January 6, 2019 | The Epiphany of the Lord

Is 60:1-6  
Eph 3:2-3a, 5-6  
Mt 2:1-12

By Don Timmerman

This story of the Three Kings gives us a clue as to who the followers of Jesus believed him to be. The Gospel writer shows that Christ in their minds is a king, but not a king of this world. Christ came into the world being born of an unmarried couple, riding a donkey, not a limo, and having nothing, not even a place to stay. He was a threat to the establishment of how things are to be, and a king was out to kill him. Christ came as a refugee.

The believers of Christ saw that he came to make people – not a country – great again. He showed by his words and actions that greatness is not dependent on what you own or how rich you are. Greatness is not about having power, having a lot of huge weapons able to destroy others, but by how much love you have for all, including your enemies. Greatness is not about boasting or seeking status in the world, but by being humble and gracious to all. Greatness is not shown by how many people you have to serve you and your interests, but by how you serve others and look out for their interests and concerns. Greatness is not shown by crushing those around you in order for you to have more, but by being there to help those around you who are in distress, those who have nothing due to disasters or unfairness.

You are as great as how much you are willing to help others in need. Recently, 30 people in Milwaukee were arrested while protesting the refusal to allow immigrants asylum status, the use of tear gas against those trying to get asylum, and the threat of building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico. Like Christ, the protesters demanded justice for all. Every first Thursday of the month in Milwaukee we assemble and pray in front of the I.C.E. building on Knapp St. asking that there be no more separation of children from their parents and family. We cannot call ourselves great if we turn away those in distress and harm them for no other reason than to stop them from enjoying what we have in the U.S.

The fact that in the story three kings came to see Jesus is instructional. The three kings were the first non-Jews to recognize Jesus as a leader, a king. So the early Christians believed that all people, Jews and Gentiles, can be followers of Christ. His teaching of love is for all people. The gifts in the story were gifts from Arabia usually given to earthly kings. Gold is the symbol of divinity. It is the symbol of love. Frankincense is a white resin or gum. When burned it gives off a pleasant odor in palaces of kings. It is a symbol of holiness and righteousness. Myrrh is also a product of Arabia from a tree. It is used in embalming the dead. It was also used as a drink when combined with wine. It is a symbol of the suffering and death Christ endured. It is a symbol of serving.

The three kings learned the greatness of Jesus. They traveled a long distance at a great cost to worship Jesus. King Herod asked the kings to tell him where Jesus was born so no one would take away his power, prestige and riches. Because the kings returned by another route, they were changed by meeting the baby Jesus. Now they understood who a great person really is. Now they understood what makes a person a king, a great person. It is not wealth, power, treasure, etc., but it is a loving heart willing to sacrifice for the sake of helping others.

Don Timmerman is a long-time peace activist, practitioner of non-violence, and member of the Casa Maria Catholic Worker Community in Milwaukee, WI.