

## *The Epiphany of the Lord* *January 5, 2020*

*“and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” (Matthew 2:11)*

For the last few years, I have encouraged both myself as pastor and each of you as our parishioners to undertake a parish resolution as we begin this new year. I believe this is a worthy endeavor and can unite us more closely as a family. I believe this also unites us with the three wisemen who presented to the Christ child their gifts. Therefore, what will be our gift to present to Jesus this year? After much prayer and thought, I would like to encourage all of us here to resolve to present to Jesus the gift of our mouths; to reconsider the way we speak to and about others.

If you are like me, then you probably have become aware of the ever-growing lack of civility which is plaguing our society. It seems that almost everyday you or I can point to a new story we have read or listened to describing how one person or one group is the worst person or group ever to grace God’s green earth. Words, once used sparingly due to their sensitive nature, are now commonly thrown around as labels designating the “good” (one group) from the “bad” (the opposing group). Coupled with this degrading language, we now see a growing rise in violence towards others. We have devolved from the weapon of “water cooler gossip” to the weapons of fists, knives, and guns. When a society has reached a level where its citizens can no longer feel secure in a house of worship, then something within that society has gone terribly wrong.

Yet our time, our society, is not singular in dealing with issues which have arisen due to the abuse of both language and power. During the great golden age of ancient philosophy which occurred in Greece, we can still read of the struggles between Plato and the sophists. The “sophists” were groups of well thought of wordsmiths. All this was due to their appearance, their educational background, their income, and celebrity almost cult-like status. These were men who (quoting Josef Pieper in his book *Abuse of Language - Abuse of Power*) were “highly paid and popularly applauded experts in the art of twisting words, who were able to sweet-talk something bad into something good and to turn white into black.” Are we so different as we now laud our highly paid celebrity experts with their many university degrees and influential twitter followers?

Yes, our times may not be different from those of Plato, but our response can be different. Unlike Plato, we are Christian. We must rely upon the gift we have been given, our faith. We must seek to respond to others by allowing this gift to permeate our lives and speech. Might I suggest a very simple way to offer God the gift of one’s mouth? Before we utter the first word, to another person this year, let us imagine we are speaking to Jesus Christ Himself. This will be the way in which we live out our parish resolution. I am not just speaking to the person who either agrees or disagrees with me; rather I am speaking to Jesus or about Jesus. I think it would be rather interesting to examine our words, asking ourselves these simple questions: “Is this the way I am going to speak with Jesus? Are these the words I am going to us? Or, is this the way I want to speak to Jesus about Jesus?” Try this approach for one month and tell me if you notice a difference in how you speak, what you speak about, and what you choose to say concerning others.