

**Homily for the Solemnity of the Epiphany
St. Casimir Church of Mother of the Americas Parish
Chicago, Illinois
January 1-2, 2022**

**† Most Rev. Thomas John Paprocki
Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

As a native son of this parish, it is a privilege for me to celebrate and preach at this Mass with you today. My parents, John and Veronica Paprocki, were parishioners here and were married in this church on September 11, 1948. This is the church where I was baptized, on August 24, 1952, just nineteen days after I was born. I made my First Confession here and received my First Holy Communion in this church on May 6, 1962, when I was in fourth grade. I received the Sacrament of Confirmation in this church on May 7, 1964, when I was in sixth grade. The bishop who confirmed me was Bishop Aloysius Wycislo, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago at the time, who would later become Bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin. I graduated from St. Casimir Grade School here in 1966, after which I began my studies for the priesthood in high school at Quigley Preparatory Seminary South. After I was ordained as a priest at Mundelein Seminary on May 10, 1978, I returned to celebrate my First Mass as a priest right here in this church on May 14,

1978. I again returned to celebrate Mass here after I was ordained a Bishop by Cardinal George at Holy Name Cathedral on March 19, 2003. So this church, dedicated to St. Casimir and now the parochial church of Mother of the Americas Parish, played a very prominent role in my formation as a Catholic and in my vocation as a priest and now as a bishop.

Actually, I am not the first bishop from this parish. The first bishop from this parish was Bishop Stanislaus Bona, who was appointed bishop ninety years ago last month at the age of forty-three. Not only was he a parishioner here as a child and attended St. Casimir Grade School, but he returned to serve as Pastor of St. Casimir Parish from 1922 to 1931. On December 18, 1931, then-Monsignor Bona was appointed as the second Bishop of Grand Island in Nebraska, by Pope Pius XI. On December 2, 1944, Bishop Bona was named Coadjutor Bishop of the Diocese of Green Bay in Wisconsin. He succeeded Bishop Paul Rhode as the seventh Bishop of Green Bay upon the latter's death on March 3, 1945. He attended all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council between 1962 and 1965. Bishop Bona died at age 79 in Green Bay on December 1, 1967.

His biography in *The New World*, the official newspaper of the Archdiocese of Chicago, described Bishop Bona as "a man of rare simplicity

of character. . . . He is deeply sympathetic and possesses profound understanding. His zeal is vouched for by both his life and his deeds. His sanctity is the kind that strives to hide itself in becoming humility. . . .”¹

Why am I telling you all this? I am telling you about Bishop Bona and my own experience here at this church, especially for the young people here to know that this parish has produced many vocations as priests, bishops, and religious sisters over the years. I hope you will hear our stories and be encouraged to know that I was once sitting where you are now sitting, and to consider that God may also be calling you to become a religious sister, a priest, or maybe even a bishop someday!

Today the Church celebrates the Solemnity of the Epiphany. The journey of the wise men to Bethlehem is a journey made in answer to God’s call and in hope of finding what—or whom—they were looking for. These men set out to follow a star, seen as a sign of the birth of someone great, making the long and arduous journey, probably coming from present-day Iran to Israel. This is a pilgrimage of hope. Surely, they must have asked themselves at times if this journey into the unknown was wise and worth travelling. Was it worth suffering through the bitter nights, the blazing hot days and many a desert storm, just to follow a star? Only the hope of a better

world, and a greater king than the ones they already knew, could have kept them going. Finally, they arrived at Bethlehem and found the star that they had followed, “halted over the place where the child was.”

Today’s Gospel tells us that the star “filled them with delight” – delight so great that it brought them to their knees in wonder and in worship. Their hope had been given flesh in the most unexpected way, in their finding the tiny Christ child with Mary and Joseph. Hope did not end for the wise men, nor does it end for us, in the stable at Bethlehem – for them it was the vision that compelled them to journey on, to return to their homes by a different route and allow themselves to be transformed by the journey.

At King’s College, in Cambridge, England, on the east wall of the chapel, behind the altar, there hangs a great painting by Peter Paul Rubens. It is *The Adoration of the Magi*. Three travelers from the east have journeyed far to look for the “infant king of the Jews.” The Christmas story, as told by Matthew, gives us this great feast that we celebrate today – the Epiphany, that is, the revealing of Christ to the peoples of the whole world.

In St. Matthew’s Gospel we meet the powerful political figure of King Herod. Once in power, his main objective seems to have been to stay in

power. Herod's preoccupation with power has made him so self-obsessed that he even fears the birth of a child as some kind of threat to his own throne.

In Jerusalem, Herod's advisors, the religious and political elite, gather to discuss the political situation. These people are experts on how to manage things. They seem to know what they are talking about. They know *where* the Messiah will be born. But they don't seem to be very interested in *when*, as long as it does not upset their routines of control. These people enjoy their position and their work, but they are not interested in the wider world.

The travelers, however, are very interested in the wider world. They are seekers after wisdom. They look for the meaning of things. They do not settle down in the comfort of the here and now. Their life is a journey, and they seek answers to life's great questions. When they find a "lowly cattle shed," they fall on their knees in homage to a child. All their searching and all their studying has brought them to this place, and to this newborn king.

Today's feast invites us to join the Magi, and to become wise travelers through this world. It is a great temptation, in our lives, to become like Herod, self-centered in our own world, ruling our lives according to our own desires.

Alternatively, we can go on the journey, like the wise men of old, and look for the child, and adore when we find him. When we accept this challenge, then, for as long as we are on this Earth, we are on the journey. We follow wherever Christ leads us. Saint Peter, who spent many a day in the Lord's company, was never finished with learning. There is always so much to discover. "The truth I have now come to realize," Peter said on one famous occasion, "is that God does not have favorites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him."

In this Eucharistic liturgy, we experience Jesus as the light for our hearts and the one calls us to follow Him. As we approach Christ in Holy Communion at Mass, you and I can truly say that we who walked in darkness have seen a great light. May a light go on in our spirit so that we can see the treasure of our relationship with Christ. May our gathering around this altar and our celebration of the Eucharist always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ <https://www.gbdioc.org/docman/resource-and-support/archives/842-most-reverend-stanislaus-v-bona/file>