

they had come by many a winding river, over many a lofty mountain and far stretching plain until they arrived in Jerusalem. Being told by the chief priests that prophecy pointed to Nazareth as the birth-place of the new-born King, they resumed their journey under the guidance of the star until at Bethlehem they found the Divine Child in the arms of His virgin mother, and falling down they adored Him and they offered Him gifts—gold, frankincense and myrrh. In the persons of the eastern wise men the Gentile world has been called by God to the true faith. This vocation is one of heaven's greatest mercies, because the true faith is, as the Council of Trent declares, the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and the root of all justification, "without which it is impossible to please God." (Heb. xi., 6.) It is for this reason that the children of the Church have at all times prized the true faith as the greatest treasure upon earth. For it the Martyrs shed their blood, the Confessors professed it fearlessly before hostile tyrants and ferocious mobs. Virgins, overcoming the timidity of their sex, lived for it and died for it. For it our Irish forefathers suffered the loss of property and of life. They clasped the faith to their bleeding breasts and refused to surrender it but with their life-blood, handing it down to their children as a priceless legacy too precious to be lost. We are the inheritors of this glorious faith, and we should feel and say with good Father Faber:

"Faith of our fathers; days of old,
Within our hearts speak gallantly.
For ages thou hast stood by us,
Dear Faith; and we will stand by thee.
Faith of our fathers; holy faith,
We will be true to thee till death."

But the faith that will open heaven to us must be an active, living faith; must be a faith working through charity. Such a faith will move us to offer Our Lord gifts symbolized by the gold, frankincense and myrrh offered Him by the Eastern Kings. The gold that our dear Lord prizes is the gold of our heart's love. He pleads with us for it; He sweetly solicits us for it. He says

invitingly to each of us: "My child, give me your heart." That heart belongs to Him, it is made for Him; its unappeasable longings, its hunger and thirst after the sovereign happiness and supreme good can only be satisfied by the possession of God. The twofold love of God and of our neighbors is the magnet that draws the heart from the allurements of the passions and draws it to God, its centre and its home. As the heart panteth after the fountains of waters, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God, says the royal Psalmist. And St. Augustin exclaims:

"Thou hast made our hearts for Thee, O God, and they are not at rest until they repose in Thee."

We should offer Our Lord the frankincense of prayer. Incense is the symbol of prayer that mounts up with grateful fragrance before the throne of God. Prayer is the golden key that unlocks for us the gates of heaven. Offer to Him this incense, viz., the prayer of Adoration, by which we acknowledge Him as our God; the prayer of Petition, by which to obtain the graces and mercies we so much need; and the prayer of Thanksgiving; by which we manifest our deepest gratitude for his unnumbered blessings and countless favors. Another gift remains for us to offer our beloved Saviour—the myrrh of self-denial and mortification. "For if," as St. Paul says, "you live according to the flesh you shall die, but if by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh you shall live." And again: "They that are Christ's crucify the flesh, with its vices and concupiscences."

These are some of the salutary lessons taught us by the mysteries of the Divine Infancy. Let us ask of our new-born King to give us the grace to put them in practice. If in this way we spend the Januaries of our life, telling the beads of our days and months and years in prayerful spirit and with humble, contrite hearts, the end of this mortal pilgrimage will be for us but the beginning of an everlasting life of happiness in the beatific vision of God. Amen. Amen.