

“Where is the new born king of the Jews?”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

(I will now tell you the legend of ‘The Other Wise Man.’)

Once upon a time, the fourth Wise Man, Artaban, preparing for the journey, takes with him a bag of precious stones to give to the baby-king.

On his way to join the other three wise men, Artaban stops to help a poor person. The delay is just enough to make him miss his rendezvous with the others.

And Artaban never catches up with them. He constantly runs into people who need help. He always stops to help them. In the process, Artaban eventually gives away all his precious stones. As the story ends, Artaban is old and poor. He never realized his dream--to meet the King of Kings and to place, at his feet, his gift of precious stones.

This story could end here and one might say it is a sad story. It would be the story of a man, who never realized his one, big dream.

BUT, the story doesn't end here. Oh no, not by a long shot! Listen, as the story continues.

One day, Artaban is in Jerusalem. The city is buzzing with excitement. Authorities are about to execute a criminal. When Artaban sees the criminal, his heart skips a beat.

Something tells him this is the King of Kings, the one for whom he has been searching all his life. Artaban is heartbroken at what he sees. Nearly crawling along the street, Jesus is bloodied, beaten, and broken. Artaban is even more heartbroken ...that he can do nothing to help the King.

Their eyes meet; uncannily, Artaban hears the King's voice, in his head, clearly and softly, say:

“Don't be heartbroken, Artaban. All your life, you have been helping me. When I was hungry, you gave me food. When I was thirsty, you gave me drink. When I was naked, you clothed me. When I was a stranger, you took me in.”

I share the story of Artaban with you because it is the story of many people in our world ...the story of many people in this room.

How so-o, you ask.

Well, I am glad you asked that question!

*Like Artaban, they begin life with a dream of doing something great, something important. **But**, as time passes, circumstances, often beyond their control, interfere with their dream. Eventually, it slips through their fingers; it disappears.*

For example, consider the story of a talented young woman, who dreams of a professional career in business or art. Before she can launch her career, she meets a boy, falls in love, and marries. Soon, they begin a family. As they do, the young woman's dream gradually fades, as did Artaban's. The woman ends up giving herself, full-time, to her young family.

Were the story to end here, one might say it was sad story ...of a woman who never realized her one, big dream.

But, it doesn't end here. It won't end until, some day in the future, when Jesus says to the woman:

“You've been helping me all your life. What you did for your family, you did for me.”

For example, consider the story of a talented young man who dreams of climbing the corporate ladder. He works hard & gives his all. **But**, the bottom drops out. The housing market collapses; the stock market crashes. He keeps his job, but is frozen on a very low 'rung' of the ladder.

Through it all, the young man remains honest, works hard, & is forever loyal. **But**, no “advance.”

Were the story to end here, one might say it was a sad story ...of a man who never realized his one, big dream.

But, it doesn't end here. It won't end until, some day, Jesus says to the man what he said to Artaban:

“You’ve been helping me all your life. What you did honestly, faithfully, & loyally, you did for me.”

For example, consider the story of a fellow named Tony. He traveled the world, appearing on stage and on TV as a drummer in a famous music group. Then, one day, Tony felt called to the priesthood.

When he resigned from the group to enter the seminary, people thought him to be a fool.

Were the story to end here, one might say it was a sad story ...of a man who realized the dream of a lifetime, and let it slip through his fingers.

But, it doesn't end here. Tony is now a priest in the Diocese of Dallas. He is he a pastor. He has a parish with a school; all is going very well. Fr. Tony is tremendously fulfilled and happy. Jesus will, one day, say to him what he said to Artaban:

“You’ve been helping me all you life, Tony. What you did for your parishioners, you did for me.”

The story of the Feast of the Epiphany reminds us that we all have a gift that we can give to the King of Kings.

The story of “The Other Wise Man” reminds us that our gift is far more precious than those of the other 3 wise men.

Our gift is not a mere, one-time gift of gold, frankincense, or myrrh. It is a fulltime... lifetime... gift of love and service!

Some may consider us ‘the fool’ for giving such a gift. **But**, that's only because they don't know the end of the story. The story will end with Jesus saying to us what he said to Artaban:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father.

Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food.

I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me....

Whatever you did for one of these least... you did for me.” Mt.25: 35-35 & 40

I now close, again, with St. Ignatius of Loyola's, “Prayer for Generosity:”

**“Lord, teach me to be generous.
Teach me to serve you as you deserve;
to give and not count the cost;
to fight and not heed the wounds;
to toil and not to seek for rest;
to labor and not ask for reward,
except to know...
that I am doing your will.”**

And to all you wise men & women before me, I say (for it's still the Christmas Season for another day):
Merry Christmas; May almighty God, our Abba, bless you, the Father, the Son, & the Holy Spirit.
Amen.