Epiphany is a word associated with an encounter with the divine, celebrating magi who followed a star and found themselves encountering the Son of God. Over time, the word epiphany has morphed into something more trivial and mundane as in having what we might call a new insight or an “a ha” moment of sorts which waters down what the word “epiphany” is really meant to convey. For instance, when a child discovers peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, the child had an epiphany that “hey, peanut butter and jelly taste really good together”. This isn’t the best usage of the word epiphany. The word epiphany is best used when associating with an encounter with God.

We encounter Herod who is very hostile to the thought of an Epiphany, of encountering the divine. He’s very hostile to the thought of a Christ child. The idea of the Son of God being born in his kingdom was a threat. He was more interested in safeguarding his power and the comforts he enjoyed. All the comforts we enjoy can certainly be seen as blessings much of the time, but it must be said that all the comforts we enjoy can also be, at times, a hindrance or a roadblock to encountering the divine. What I mean by this is we only have so many hours in the day and we only have so many days in our life. And so, why spend any more time to pray each day when I can spend more time staring into my screen? We end up making bad choices like that sometimes, opting for what is lesser treasure. And so, it must be said that comforts can sometimes be a hindrance to experiencing real epiphanies of our own. The extreme example of this is King Herod. This is why spiritual masters have recommended a fair measure of prayer and fasting for those who wish to encounter the divine in more meaningful way. I believe this is something for us to consider as we enter into a New Year. I’d like to suggest that we obligate ourselves to treating every Friday as a penitential day of prayer, abstinence, and fasting with the intention of being ever more contemplative, saying “no” to our bodies and purifying these bodies of ours, and growing in our hunger and thirst for the Lord.

The magi stand in stark contrast to King Herod. These are people who sacrificed a lot of comforts and risked many dangers to make their pilgrimage to encounter the Lord. They represent the human condition of a people wandering in darkness seeking light. Aren’t we all that way at times, walking in darkness seeking light. The magi sacrificed much to encounter Christ, and so must we, if we really want to encounter the Lord in a more meaningful way. The question this feast day poses to us: what’s holding us back from embarking on an adventure to seek God in a more meaningful way? If we’re honest with ourselves, what’s holding us back could very well be a fear of losing some of the comforts we cling to or are addicted to. The gift Jesus gave the magi was far more valuable and precious. The epiphany given to the magi, the greatest treasure, was nothing less than the hope of eternal salvation through Jesus. Let’s never settle for lesser treasure.