

Traveling overseas brings with it interesting situations. We at least share an alphabet with most European countries. But when you are somewhere without anything familiar, places with their own scripts or hieroglyphics.

Being able to read is one thing. But around the world, sometimes even the simplest things can become difficult. Universal symbols aren't necessarily as universal as we might think. Throughout most of the world, stop signs are a familiar octagon. But in Japan, they look more like our yield signs; and in China, it's just a circle with a bunch of scribbles in the center.



We can only begin to imagine the struggles of the Holy Family in their flight to Egypt; or the difficulties in communication and travel experienced by the Magi, whom we meet in today's Solemnity of the Epiphany.

In the Gospel, the Magi rather innocently approach King Herod. In actuality, Herod is a pretender to the throne, and is propped up by political connections he has with the various Roman officials.

But, since they're looking for a new-born king, they go to the place where you find kings. And instead, set Herod off on a murderous rampage.

They're not looking for this king because they received an invitation in the mail; or because they read about it in a newspaper. Instead, they tell Herod:

*Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star at its rising
and have come to do him homage.*

Stars are hardly particular about where they shine. Nor are they very selective in who gets to see them. How many people saw the same star, and didn't understand the sign? The Magi saw it and understood. When they showed it to Herod, he saw it as a threat. Probably most people who saw it ignored it. Maybe they just slept through the night and never knew it was there.

Not only did the Magi recognize the sign, but they followed it, and acted on it. Their gifts reflect their recognition of the deepest meanings of this sign: Gold for the King of King; Incense for the only Son of God; and Myrrh for His death – Christ's sacrificial offering of Himself.

We are surrounded by signs. Most of which, we hope, we understand. If we don't understand a sign, we may end up doing the wrong thing. If we ignore an important sign, we may end up in danger. Or we may miss an opportunity.

The catechism teaches that:

*Sacraments are outward signs of inward grace,
instituted by Christ
for our sanctification.*

Our lives are marked by these Sacramental signs – Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Reconciliation, Anointing, Matrimony, Holy Orders ... do we recognize these signs in our daily lives? Do we realize the effects of these signs on us as individuals.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ – let us pray for a new realization of the inward graces effected on us by the outward signs ... the Sacraments ... we have received. Let the Eucharist we receive today inflame the fire of God's divine love in us ... allowing us to not only receive the graces poured out upon us, but giving us the power to act on what God has so generously given us.