

## **Pope warns against "conventional religion" that "does not change our lives"**

*At Mass for the Epiphany, Pope Francis wonders if the Church's words and rituals are bringing people closer to God or if they only offer a "dead language"*

Celebration of the Feast of the Epiphany in St. Peter's Basilica, Thursday, January 6.

By Loup Besmond de Senneville | Vatican City

Pope Francis has once again warned against a type of Catholicism that is obsessed with formalities and rituals, saying Christian faith is a journey and not an armor with which to protect oneself.

He made his remarks on Thursday while celebrating Mass with some 1,500 people who gathered St. Peter's Basilica for the Feast of the Epiphany.

"Where did the Magi's pilgrimage to encounter Jesus begin? What made these men of the East set out on their journey?" the pope asked."

They had excellent reasons not to depart. They were wise men and astrologers, famous and wealthy," he said, noting that, nonetheless, the Magi long for something greater – "to see the light". "Where are we on our journey of faith?" Francis then drew a parallel between the situation of those whom tradition refers to as "the Magi" and believers today.

He pointed out that the barriers to faith today include "consumerism", "a drab and dreary faith" and "the fear of becoming involved and serving others and the common good".

"Where are we on our journey of faith?" he asked his fellow worshipers.

"Have we been stuck all too long, nestled inside a conventional, external and formal religiosity that no longer warms our hearts and changes our lives?" he wondered.

"Do our words and our liturgies ignite in people's hearts a desire to move towards God, or are they a 'dead language' that speaks only of itself and to itself?"  
"It is sad... to fall into clerical functionalism"

The 85-year-old pope then returned to the theme of journeying. "Faith is not a suit of armor that encases us; instead, it is a fascinating journey, a constant and restless movement, ever in search of God," he insisted, stressing the importance of having a "desire" to know God.

"To desire means to fuel the fire that burns within us; it drives us to look beyond what is immediate and visible," he continued.

"It is sad when a priest has closed the door of desire, sad to fall into clerical functionalism, very sad," the Jesuit pope lamented.

He said believers must instead take into account "the explosive and unsettling joy of the Gospel".

"Brothers and sisters, let us dream, let us seek and let us adore," Francis said. He encouraged his fellow Catholics "to journey together and to listen to one another, so that the Spirit can suggest to us new ways".

"That is also one of the tasks of the Synod," he insisted, a reference to the synodal process that was launched in October to prepare for the next gathering of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in 2023. The pope said it is a method for finding "ways and paths to bring the Gospel to the hearts of those who are distant, indifferent or without hope, yet continue to seek what the Magi found: a great joy".

"Today, we can take this advice: look at the star and walk," Francis said later during his reflections at the noonday Angelus.

"Never stop walking," he told the several thousand people that gathered in St. Peter's Square under a light rain. "Never stop looking at the star."