**Homily for New Governor of Pohnpei**

January 13, 2008

Today we are gathering in a church to celebrate the election of a new governor of Pohnpei and to mark the beginning of a new administration of our state. Why in a church? Because most of us here on Pohnpei, as in the rest of Micronesia, are Christians. Because all of us–Protestant, Catholic, SDA, evangelical–share a common belief in Jesus Christ as our Lord, even if Christianity is not really a state religion.

We gather to celebrate this event in a church because we are accustomed to doing this whenever a new governor is elected. In other words, this has become a custom. A custom different from other parts of Pohnpeian culture–isimahs, kamadipwen wahu, or other traditional feasts–but still something that has become part of our life–like Christmas or Easter, or the pidek during the week before Easter.

We often make the distinction between tiahk, government and church–and there is no doubt that these three areas of life are different. But we are here today because they overlap and intersect with one another. The boundaries between them are not airtight, but porous. We believe, I hope, that we can be faithful to our culture, good citizens of our government, and dedicated to our church at the same time. We need not choose among these three areas of life. Our life can be enriched by all three, and each of the three may be able to support the others.

But there is another reason we gather in a church to celebrate this event–that is, because we believe that the faith we share has something important to tell us about what a government leader should be and how he should lead.

Last Sunday we celebrated the final day of the Christmas season–the revelation of Jesus to the world in the feast of the Epiphany, or the Feast of the Three Kings. I would like to suggest that we look at this feast a bit to see what light it might offer us as our new governor prepares to take office.

In the gospel of Matthew (2.1-12), there are four kings presented to us, not just three. Herod, the Jewish king, is the fourth. What can we learn from them?

Herod, the local ruler, is interested in just one thing–preserving his own throne and keeping his power. To do so, he will sacrifice everything. He is ready to kill the child who will save his nation just to preserve office.

To the extent that a leader becomes focused on retaining power, keeping the favor of his constituents, getting re-elected, he may neglect to do the very thing that he ought to do for the sake of his people. It is tempting to destroy the very thing that will save us just because it is unpopular. (Example) Generosity! Courage!

The three Magi understood that they needed something that they lacked. They were seekers of wisdom, the sort of educated people who searched the skies for signs of divine help. When they found a star, they followed it, not knowing where it would lead them. They crossed their own boundaries and traveled beyond the world they knew and were familiar with. When it led them to a strange and poor land, far from their own, they continued their journey. They were even willing to kneel in front of a poor child and pay homage. If they had been culture-bound, convinced that no good thing could be found outside of their own land, they never would have found Jesus.

What can we learn from this? That a leader is humble, knowing that he might find what he needs far from home. (Sermon that a deacon once gave after a trip to Chuuk, where he expected to find sempoak, saminimin and semwemwe, but admitted that he found a strong church there that could put his own to shame).

He also has to be determined to travel long and hard to find what he’s looking for. I’m not suggesting that our new leaders governor jump on the plane every week at state expense with perdiem in their pockets. But a leader is going to have to put in the time and effort to bring his plans to fruition. Long journey on a camel through the desert means, in this case, willingness to spend long days and nights working through budgets, planning meetings, and seeing the people who have to be seen to make the government work. The leader also needs vision, the ability to see stars that he can steer by. His travels and his day-to-day work are all guided by distant goals and ideals.

The Magi brought gifts to the Savior. The gifts were gold, frankincense and myrrh–each distinctive of his own country. They represented the best that the country produced–a fitting tribute to the Jesus who came as a light for all nations, not simply as the savior of the Jews. As they knelt before the Child, I like to think that they began to understand that he was introducing a world that was no longer a tangle of different languages and cultures, separate countries–but a world that would be united in some way through the light that this Child represented.

The leader needs to respect his homeland and what it can produce. The land and its fruits are a treasure–not one to be hoarded, but one to be shared with the world. Pohnpei may be small, but why shouldn’t it be able to make distinctive contribution to the Pacific and the rest of the world? In the end, the leader should understand that we all live under the light of that star that leads us to the one who is our true king.

That’s a big task, for our new governor, lieutenant governor and all the rest of us. Our leaders must be more committed to assisting their people find the hope they need to grow than to hang on to their own power. They must have the courage to put their own popularity aside to search for what will help their people develop. They need humility to look beyond their own office, or even their own homeland, for what we might call development possibilities. They need persistence to follow the star, wherever it might lead. They need the confidence in their own people to make of this a special gift, and the vision to see a single world, a world of peace and understanding, to which each people contributes.

It’s really too big a task for these people alone. But that’s why we’re here–to pray to the Lord who came as our Savior to enlighten and guide them during the next four years. Our prayers and support go with them as they begin their work.