

12 Presentation of the Lord      Year A      February 2, 2020  
Malachi 3:1-4      Psalm 24      Hebrews 2:10-11,13-18      Luke 2:22-40

Today's Feast of the Presentation of the Lord may seem rather strange and out of sequence because we have already taken down the Christmas decorations and put away the creches. Indeed, two Sundays of Ordinary Time have passed during which the adult Jesus has been baptized, begun His public ministry and called His first Apostles. This is where knowledge of Jewish custom and history helps us understand the momentary shift out of Ordinary Time and back to when Jesus was a baby.

The Gospel says, *"When the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, Mary and Joseph brought the Child Jesus up to Jerusalem to present Him to the Lord."* Mosaic Law set this time of purification as 40 days after the birth of a male child and today is 40 days after Christmas.

What occurs on this holy day takes place for countless other Jewish mothers and their sons. At the same time, on the fortieth day the baby's mother is ritually purified after having had her child. The rite of purification includes a burnt offering to the Lord. For the wealthy the sacrifice was of a one-year lamb or goat, and for the poor, the sacrifice of two turtle doves or young pigeons, as Mary and Joseph do here.

Jewish Law requires the firstborn son to be dedicated the Lord. As her firstborn son, Jesus is consecrated to the Lord, and while this does not have to take place in a temple, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem for the dedication.

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple by Mary and Joseph carries with it more than the fulfillment of the Jewish Law. It is God's present to us, the giving of His presence to us in Jesus Christ. God does this out of pure love for us, not because we merited it or earned it, nor because it is owed to us. God gives us this gift of His Son freely, in order to overcome the separation of humanity that resulted from sin.

This newborn Child, the Father's gift of creation, will in turn offer His whole life back to God in an act of sacrificial self-giving at Calvary. The Child who is present in the Temple at Jerusalem will one day die in this same city, destroying this Temple and raising up a new Temple, His Catholic Church, His Body.

The Presentation of the Lord is not only a moment of fulfillment but also a moment of hope. Jesus is the glory of Israel and light to the Gentiles. He is illumination for every culture, the road to living in the image of God we were created to be.

Another one of the names of today's feast is the *Feast of Encounter*. The term *encounter* suggests an element of surprise. All their lives, Simeon and Anna have been preparing themselves for their encounter of the Messiah in the Temple, even though they did not know when or how it would happen. Because of their prayers and attentiveness to the Spirit, these two elderly people are finally able to see the splendor of God in Mary's small Child.

Simeon and Anna are just and pious people, and their hearts are full of expectant hope in the fulfillment of the promises God has made to Israel about her redemption. Together, they represent all who ever longed for the coming of the Messiah and for the redemption of humanity.

Christ encounters Simeon, a righteous and devout man who is awaiting the consolation of Israel. He is filled with the Holy Spirit, who reveals to him that he will not see death before he has seen "*the Christ of the Lord.*" It is the same Spirit who guides Simeon to come to the Temple that day.

Simeon continues to pray for redemption as he waits. Then the day comes. Imagine how tender that moment must have been when Simeon and Anna first see the child in Mary's arms. Simeon takes Him into his arms saying, "for my eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to Your people Israel." You can almost feel the emotion welling up in his words, "Master, you may now dismiss your servant in peace, according to Your word."

Christ encounters Anna, a prophetess, an elderly woman who never left the temple and who has worshipped night and day with fasting and prayer. She, too, gives thanks to God as she announces Christ's presence to "*all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.*"

How do we prepare to encounter Christ? Perhaps we should look at how Simeon and Anna in the Gospel were preparing to meet Christ. They are full of unwavering faith and are obedient to the Law of Moses. They are righteous and reverent and filled with

the Holy Spirit and obedient to His promptings. They have worshipped God daily and fasted and prayed. They have humbly awaited redemption and trusted in our Lord's promises.

It is in these daily routines when they recognize Christ in their midst and announce it to others. Are we living our lives with such preparation? Will we also endure in our daily lives to encounter Christ?

How blessed are we that the resurrected Lord has come to His Temple, His Catholic Church, to remain with us forever. In the Holy Eucharist, under the appearance of ordinary bread and wine changed to His Most Holy Body and Blood, Jesus comes to meet us waiting for us to embrace Him and hold Him close to our hearts. When you receive Jesus in the Holy Eucharist, take Jesus into your hands and into your heart. Unlike Simeon, Christ dwells *in you*. In Baptism, Jesus takes up residence in the temple of our hearts as well. By the shedding of His Blood and the outpouring of His Spirit, He has delivered us from death.

Like Simeon and Anna, let us prepare ourselves for our encounter with Our Lord. We may be surprised to meet Him in those around us, in the poor and the helpless, the sick and the dying. He is always waiting for us in His Temple, His Holy Catholic Church. Christ's love, stronger than any sin we may commit, will purify us. Then like Simeon, we will be filled with His "*peace*." Like Anna we will give "*thanks to God*."

This last echo of Christmas for this year teaches us that we can be like Simeon and Anna. As we return to our Church's season called Ordinary Time, we can encounter and embrace Christ more fully as He come comes to the *temple* of our lives and see in Him our fulfillment, our hope and our Truth. We can encounter and embrace Christ more fully in our Holy Mass, in the Holy Eucharist and in our brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to bring the Light of Christ into all the corners of our world so that others may also encounter Him.