

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

Gospel: Luke 2:22-40

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord"), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons."

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace, according to your word; 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." And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem. When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

REFLECTION 1:

A DREAM REALISED

This is a wonderful feast that is normally appreciated by weekday Mass goers. Today should be the 4th Sunday in Ordinary Time, but since the 2nd of February falls on a Sunday this year, the Feast of the Presentation takes precedence. Traditionally today is the day when candles for the celebration of the liturgy during the year are blessed. This arises from the account in the Gospel of St. Luke, when Christ the Light who enlightens the Gentiles comes into the Temple in Jerusalem and is recognised as the Saviour of his people Israel.

The Jews recognised their own nation as the chosen people who were bound someday to be masters of the world and Lord of all nations. To usher in that day, some believed that a great champion would emerge when all the old glories would revive. However, in contrast to this, there was a small group known as the Anawin, the 'Quiet of the Land'. They had no dream of violence or the power of armies hoisting banners. They believed in a life of prayer and quiet watchfulness until the Messiah would come. Simeon was one of these and God had promised him that he would not see death until he had seen God's anointed King, and in the infant Jesus he recognised that king and was glad. Now he was ready to depart and his words became those of the 'Nunc Dimittis' now the great night prayer of the Church. Simeon gives us a summary of the work and fate of Jesus. He will be the cause whereby many will fall - a strange and hard saying but nevertheless true. It is not so much God who judges us: we judge ourselves and on our reaction to Jesus

Christ. When confronted by the goodness and holiness of Jesus and we remain unmoved or actively hostile, then there's the great refusal. Jesus, Simeon also reminds us, will be the cause whereby many will rise. We all need a hand that will lift us up and it is this hand of Christ that lifts us out of the old life and into the new, out of shame and into glory. He also notes that Jesus will meet with much opposition. Towards Jesus there can be no neutrality.

Anna too was one of the 'Quiet of the Land'. We know nothing about her except what the verses of the Gospel tell us. But even in this brief compass, Luke has drawn a fascinating character sketch. Anna was a widow. She had known sorrow but had not grown bitter. She was now 84 years and she never ceased to hope and pray; she spent her days in God's house with his people. We can rob ourselves of a priceless treasure when we cease to be part of the worshipping community. Anna is an encouragement to those who spend time faithfully in prayer. Simeon and Anna were the first evangelizers.

It is worth noting that Luke is careful to mention that Jesus' parents, Mary and Joseph, are faithful to the traditions of Israel and to assure us that Jesus, like Pope Francis, is no radical law breaker and that no one gets a distorted impression of Jesus, writing as he was in a time of great political upheaval.