

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord A/2020

The readings of this feast focus on the presentation of our Lord Jesus in the temple. They show that Mary and Joseph, as faithful worshipers of God, fulfill to the best the requirements of the Law of Moses. They invite us to be attentive to the gifts and blessing that God bestow on us and rend him our due gratitude.

The first reading of the book of Malachi talks about the messenger that God sends to prepare the way before him. It shows that by his action the people of Israel will purify themselves, come back to God and offer him pleasing sacrifices in the temple.

What is behind this text is the idea that God refines and purifies those who approach him. There is also the idea that the pleasing sacrifice to God is that which comes from a purified heart. The last idea is related to the truth that in Jesus God has renewed his Covenant with his people.

This text allows us to understand the point of today's Gospel as it talks about the presentation of Jesus in the temple. The Gospel starts with the trip of Mary and Joseph to the temple in Jerusalem for their purification and the presentation of their first son according to the Law of Moses.

Then, the Gospel speaks of Simeon, a righteous man who, at the sight of Jesus, was full of joy as he saw with his own eyes the fulfillment of the promise God made him not to die before seeing the Messiah. The Gospel speaks also of the joy of Anna, a faithful widow, who never departed from the temple.

After that, the Gospel talks about the amazement of Mary and Joseph as they heard so many things said about their son. The Gospel ends with the mention of the return of the parents of Jesus to Galilee while Jesus himself was growing stronger, full of wisdom and God's grace.

What do we learn about today's readings? Today I want to talk about the presentation of our Lord in the temple as the fulfillment of the Law and a sign of gratitude to God. Let me start with a simple human experience. In some countries of Europe, like Belgium, when a family has a new baby, the parents, and in particular the father has an official duty to present him to the County and recognize him as his own.

As long as that did not happen, the child is not his, because he did not recognize him officially before the County. And this is the Law that each person has to respect in relation to new born children.

Something similar appears with the Law of Moses with regard to the male new-born, but with the difference that the Law of Moses required that the new born is consecrated to God. That is what we find in Exodus 13: 2, 12: "Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord". At that occasion, an offering in the temple of turtledoves or pigeons was also required.

That tradition has been respected in the case of Samuel, as we see in 1 Samuel 2: 1-11. After the consecration, his mother left him in the temple with Eli for the service of the Lord. In the case of Jesus, Mary and Joseph did not leave Jesus in the temple, but the consecration did certainly take place. Moreover, Simeon and Anna witnessed to the presence of Jesus as the fulfillment of God's promise toward his people and toward themselves.

The tradition of giving the first born to the service of God is something that many Irish families have respected in the past as we find, most of the time, that the eldest among their children have been priests or nuns.

By presenting Jesus in the temple, there are three things that Mary and Joseph do. First, they fulfill the requirement of the Law. By doing so, they show that they are true worshipers of God. A true worshiper of God is not only the one who knows the Law, but also strives to put it into practice. The Law might be demanding, but he knows that he cannot live without it because it gives meaning to his life.

Second, by presenting Jesus in the temple, Mary and Joseph manifest publicly their obedience to God. Where there is obedience, there is a stripping of our own will so that only the will of God might prevail in us. Anyone who does not fulfill God's will cannot be in harmony with him.

Moreover, to obey is to make us ready to accept God's commandments. When someone does not obey, it is always because of lack of faith in God who speaks. It is proven that the one who does not obey turns a deaf ear, does not listen to the voice of God, and finds always objections to what it is brought to him. In the end, he remains in perpetual darkness as he intentionally closes his eyes lest he sees, and puts his fingers in his ears lest he hears God's commands. Mary and Joseph obey God in knowing well that without obedience there is no way of pleasing God.

Third, by presenting Jesus in the temple, Mary and Joseph acknowledge that their baby is a gift from God. He is not the fruit of their making, but rather that of God's grace and bounty upon them. In that sense, the presentation takes the sense of thanksgiving to God for the blessing he has bestowed on them. Moreover, they acknowledge that they are not their own master, but it is God who is the master and giver of the gifts we enjoy in this world. Because God is the master, we, human beings depend on him and our life has no sense outside of him. What we can do is just to be grateful to him for the gifts we receive from his hands.

Finally, the presentation of Jesus in the temple is a moment of revelation of the sorrows that will pierce the heart of Mary: "and you yourself a sword will pierce..." Those sorrows have to do with the Blessed Mother's suffering in seeing the rejection of Jesus by the Jewish establishment; the negative response reserved to his teaching and his death on the cross. Our Lady witnessed and shared the grief of a Son who bore the weight of the sins of the world and died on the cross for our salvation.

We pray that the Lord may help us understand that all the blessings and gifts we enjoy in this world come from his hands. Therefore, it is our duty to be grateful to him by offering him back what we have received from his generosity. God bless you all!

Malachi 3: 1-4; Hebrews 2: 14-18; Luke 2: 22-40



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