

Presentation Yc 25 Homily

The Lord be with you. And also with you. A reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke.

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 turtle doves 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, alike 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 for 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. For the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ. Please be seated. In the interest of harm reduction, I'm sitting for a sermon.

Well, I've already told you it's the double of first class, and it really was a holy day of obligation. Where is everybody? But it's not quite like that. It's the middle of summer here and it was the middle of winter in Israel when Mary and Joseph went up with their firstborn, their only born, to give thanks to God, to redeem the child, which I'll say a little bit about later, and to understand what was going on.

I think that was a subtext, although it's not written about anywhere, because people weren't and aren't mind readers. But here we have two feasts in the Christian church and a custom of the ancient Hebrews, indeed part of a custom which is still held today, and one

which is represented in our old Anglican prayer book, the Book of Common Prayer. Not quite the same thing, but the purification of women after childbirth was something which was practiced by the Hebrews, by the Jews.

The purification which we have in the Book of Common Prayer is actually a thanksgiving after childbirth, because childbirth was, for so many years, a very risky thing. And many children, indeed some of their mothers, died at childbirth. And it still happens today in those areas of the world where there is insufficient medical care.

But let us go back to what was going on when Jesus was presented in the temple, the presentation, he is presented. That was a custom, and that was something very important in Jewish life. The firstborn of the family belonged to God, the firstborn son, in fact, very sexist, the autistans.

But here were Mary and Joseph, they'd come to the temple. Normally you'd go to the synagogue, but for some reason Joseph needed to go to the temple, he wanted to go to the temple. He was a devout man, he wanted to do as much as he could.

And he had to present, normally, an almost newborn lamb, which was sacrificed to God in honour of the newborn. If you were poor, you'd get away with a couple of turtle doves, who were rather smaller birds than our doves, I'm beginning to understand. So there we had a couple of turtle doves were presented, and Mary and Joseph were there in the temple.

The readings draw our attention first and foremost to the place of God in all this, that somehow God's law and God's rule required this. Malachi is a word which simply means messenger. It's no person, it is a messenger.

I am sending my messenger before you. Now there's amazing parallels all throughout the Bible, of course, and some of this is represented in the presentation. Just as there is a preliminary to John the Baptist, so there is a preliminary also to Jesus, a messenger who comes to proclaim.

The Lord will suddenly come to the temple. This is part of Old Testament sort of theology, if you like, the messenger of the covenant, the relationship between God and Israel. And this one who has come is indeed a messenger.

But he is more than a messenger. He is coming, says the Lord of hosts. And then he says, think of the day of the Lord.

Who can stand around on the day of the Lord? There's an urgency there. He is like a refiner's fire, the one who is coming. He will appear before you.

He will sit as a refiner and purifier. He will purify the sins of Levi, that's one group of priests, and he will refine them like gold and righteousness. Then the offering of Judah, the tribe of Judah, and Jerusalem, it will all be pleasing to God as in days of old and as in former years.

There is a sort of appeal to a renewal of proper temple worship, a renewal to worship with holiness in a state of holiness. You become people of righteousness that is following the law, and thus people of holiness. That is how you attain holiness in the Old Testament world.

And then we have a psalm which speaks of the coming of the Lord. Who is this one who is coming? Well, he's coming to his own. Why? Because the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the compass of the Lord, of the world, and the earth will dwell in him.

And there's a majestic ending verse that says, lift up your heads O ye gates, be lifted up your everlasting doors, and the king of glory shall come in. This is a psalm set by Joseph Gelerno, and I've got a very scratchy 45 rpm on it, sung with trumpets and drums. It's an amazing piece of music that's one way of getting the psalm across in the message.

God is glorious. God is a God of glory, but God is also a God of love. But to lift up your heads O ye gates, allow the king of glory.

And we are told in one sense also to lift up our gates inside ourselves. Lift up your hearts, lift up your gates, lift up your heads. The doors will open and the king of glory shall come in.

We often need to invoke the king of glory, to praise God for who he is, what he is, and what he's done for us. Which is why we need to rejoice in the world that he has made, as in Psalm 24, which is a hymn of creation, and the people who serve and follow God, and praise him for his creation. Then we have the reading from Hebrews, which is an enigmatic reading in some ways, but very plain and straightforward really.

It's a hymn about the one who is to come, because the epistles of Hebrews is really all about the giving of God in Jesus and the new high priest. The succession has changed. It is no longer an earthly high priest.

It is a new high priest who is coming, one who is appointed by God himself. And God, in this new high priest, frees people from slavery. Slavery from their distance from God, slavery from being under other people, and learning to be people of God again.

It is clear, the one who comes, this new priest, it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham. Jesus comes in one sense, representing God's glory, but the true thing is he has come for us, for human beings, to bring us into the new way of being, the new order, the new life. But he is one who is different.

He is a special messenger. He is a special priest. He is the new great high priest.

But he has, in every way, to be human, to be like his brothers and sisters in every respect, so that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God. And he makes a sacrifice of himself. Self-giving.

Because that is the nature of love. Love is about self-giving. Love is about self-sacrifice.

And how often do we see that in the lives of families? In some ways, this day is a feast of the Holy Family, father, mother, and child. Here is this child who has come, perhaps totally, indeed totally unaware of what his destiny is to be, set for the rise and fall of men. But he himself grows into manhood.

He himself grows into the man Jesus. And at a certain age, he begins his mission. This feast, in England, and in Europe indeed, was known originally as Candle Mass.

I wonder if you know why? Well, according to custom, all the candles for the church to be burnt over the following year were brought to be blessed on this day. It was the mass of the candles. It was the mass about light, because the one who was light has come into the world and has been welcomed into the temple.

And the church seeks to maximise this effect of the one who is light, the one who is goodness incarnate, the one who is the person we are called to follow as our great high priest, because he has offered himself for us and he calls himself to him. So, we have this marvellous feast, the presentation, the child brought. How many children do we think of? And perhaps we have to think back to when many children were brought to baptism.

Often, the air was wrecked by their crying, and people said, I wish this baptism would be over, so we can get on with worship. But it is worship, it is offering to God. And as I said, God, according to the understanding of the Old Testament, required that the first child was offered to God.

But then the child was brought back from God, brought back by an offering that was made to the synagogue or the temple, the offering of the new lamb for sacrifice. And indeed in the Old Testament, we are living in a world that is different in worship from Judaism today, and certainly different from Christianity today. But the child was brought back, redeemed for the family, which redeemed means being back.

And that's an essential part of the Testament, of the theology of our whole Gospel, Old Testament and Gospels, and the world since. So, we have a redemption of firstborn, the tabledoves are offered, Mary is purified, we are not told what form that takes. In Judaism, there are things called mikvahs, which are ritual baths, and possibly it included a ritual bath, I'm almost certain it would have.

So, childbirth, successful, is thanked for. The child is presented. And Jesus, we understand as Christians now, is becoming a child who will grow into a man.

This is a typically pious Jewish family presenting their child. This is a typically Jewish family worshipping God. But then there are these other people around, prophets and a prophetess indeed, Simeon and Anna, who seem to understand what is going on.

We have those marvellous words of the Nun, Demetrius, said it was sung, perhaps chanted, by Simeon, Lord now thatst thou my servant a part in peace. You'll remember that of course from even song. Well, here we are with Susanne and Anna.

They point out who Jesus really was. And we also learn, in some of the words that are said, that Mary must suffer too, a sword shall pierce your own heart. Well, does it mean that physical suffering is laid upon her? Well certainly, at the time of crucifixion, mental anguish is laid upon her.

And she is there faithful at the foot of the cross. So we are the heirs of Jesus. We are the followers of Jesus, just as his parents, I believe, ultimately became his followers too.

We need to always remember the mercy that God has extended to us. The Lord has visited his own. The Lord has come, the Lord, Yahweh, God, which is synonymous with Jesus for us, this Lord.

But it's also God who has come, and that's the nature of our faith. But a God who created also recreates by giving us the one who will help us recreate, be recreated, by the love and mercy of God. Israel has strayed far from God.

Prophets have helped bring her back, and now of course is the supreme opportunity that of course, as we know, they turned their back on him. But that is another story and another feast. So may we go forward with the growing Jesus.

Jesus grew in favour of both God and man, and the spirit of the Lord was upon him. He lived a life as a human being. He lived a life as an ordinary child, except the excursion into the temple later again, when he's found teaching and discussing.

Where did he get all that knowledge? Who knows? He certainly listened. He certainly is observant of the law. So this man, this law-obeyer, is the righteous one, the one who is the king of glory, revealed to us in his ministry of love, teaching and healing, revealed to us in his self-giving, revealed to us as truly a child of God, truly as God's man for us, by his self-giving on the cross, and by his mighty resurrection from the dead.

So on this day, let us give thanks to God for Jesus. Let us give thanks to God what he has done for us, and know that we can call upon Jesus and pray to him, for he is God's man for us. He was God's man with us in his earthly life, and he's still God's man with us in whatever we understand by the heavenly places.

May God, in Jesus, give us grace to follow him this day and always, as we give thanks for the obedience of Mary and Joseph, and for the life and his self-giving, and the glorious majesty of Jesus. Amen.

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