

Homily of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 2025

Malachi 3:1-4; Psalm 27:7-10; Hebrews 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40

Mary and Joseph had two reasons in mind when they took Jesus to the temple. The first reason was according to Exodus 13:1-2, "The Lord spoke to Moses and said: Consecrate to me every firstborn; whatever opens the womb among the Israelites, whether of human being or beast, belongs to me." And Numbers 18:15-16, "Every living thing that opens the womb, human being and beast alike, such are to be offered to the Lord..." This is in today's gospel.

The second reason, not in today's gospel, was according to Leviticus 12:1-8, "When a woman has a child, giving birth to a boy, she shall be unclean for seven days, ... she shall not touch anything sacred nor enter the sanctuary till the days of her purification are fulfilled. If she gives birth to a girl, for fourteen days, she shall be as unclean.... When the days of her purification for a son or for a daughter are fulfilled, she shall bring to the priest ... a yearling lamb for a burnt offering and a pigeon or a turtledove for a purification offering. The priest shall offer them before the Lord to make atonement for her, and thus she will be clean...."

Mary and Joseph were in the temple solely "to perform the custom of the law." The last thing they expected was the presence of Simeon and Anna, and their prophecies and revelations about Jesus and Mary. That was why Joseph and Mary were amazed at what Simeon and Anna said.

In addition to the visit of the Magi and the Baptism of Jesus, the event of the presentation of the Lord is another Epiphany or revealing of the Lord. In the gospel, Simeon calls Jesus a light for the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory for Israel. Anna speaks of Jesus as the redeemer of Jerusalem. The second reading tells us that Jesus is our expiator who purifies us from our sins. "Therefore, he had to become like his brothers in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people" (Hebrews 2:17). Today, Jesus is presented to us as our light, glory, redeemer, and the expiator who takes our sins away.

There is something else to ponder concerning Simeon's and Anna's relationship with God. Simeon remained "righteous and devout" till his ripe old age. Anna "never left the temple, but worshiped night and day with fasting and prayer." God rewarded them by revealing Jesus to them when he was born. This encourages us not to relent in our effort to have a close and lasting relationship with God, and never leave the temple. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you." God speaks in Jeremiah 29:13-14, "When you look for me, you will find me. Yes, when you seek me with all your heart, I will let you find me." In other words, if we present ourselves to God, he will present himself to us.

Simeon and Anna recognized Jesus in the temple. We pray that we, too, may recognize Jesus in our worship, in the Eucharist, and the word of God presented to us.

I would like to conclude with a summarized version of a story by an unknown author, which captures the message in the first reading.

A Bible study group studied Malachi 3:3, “He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver.” A puzzled lady kept pondering what this statement meant about the character and nature of God.

She decided to find out the process of refining silver. She went to a silversmith without disclosing the main reason for her visit except that she wanted to see the process of refining silver.

As she watched, the silversmith held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest as to burn away all the impurities. He not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.

The lady asked the silversmith, “How do you know when the silver is fully refined?” He smiled and answered, “Oh, that's easy—when I see my image in it.”

The lady thought to herself, that is what God does. He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver. He made us in his image and likeness and continues to refine us to become our original self.

May the word of God and the Eucharist refine us so that God sees his image in us and people also see the image of God in us. Amen.

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