

Homily of the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

When Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple, they had three purposes in mind. The first purpose 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." The second purpose was according to Numbers 18:15-16, "Every living thing that opens the womb, human being and beast alike, such as are to be offered to the Lord, shall be yours; but you must redeem the firstborn of human beings, as well as redeem the firstborn of unclean animals. For the redemption price of a son, when he is a month old, you shall pay the equivalent of five silver shekels according to the sanctuary shekel, that is, twenty gerahs." Although it was not recorded, I guess that Mary and Joseph brought to the temple this amount of money to redeem Jesus. The third purpose 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 at the entrance of the tent of meeting 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 again.... Such is the ritual for the woman who gives birth to a child, male or female. If, however, she cannot afford a lamb, she may take two turtledoves or two pigeons, the one for a burnt offering and the other for a purification offering. The priest shall make atonement for her, and thus she will again 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 manifestation of the Lord.

Let us see how the three readings presents Jesus to us:

Prophet Malachi in the first reading prophesied about Jesus as the purifier who was going to purify the people from their sins, "Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord, as in the days of old, as years gone by." We are the new Judah and new Jerusalem. We are the ones that need to be purified so that our sacrifice can be pleasing to God.

About Jesus, the second reading says, "Through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life.... 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." Jesus has the power to save us from the devil and spiritual death. He purifies us from our sins.

In the Gospel Simeon called Jesus a light for the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory for ... Israel. Anna spoke of Jesus as the redeemer of Jerusalem. Jesus is our light, glory and redeemer.

There is something more to learn from 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 close and life lasting relationship with God, by being righteous and devout, by fasting and prayer, and never leave the temple. James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." In other words, "Be present to God and he will be present to you." Psalm 91:1, 14-16 assures us, "You who dwell in the shelter [temple] of the Most High, who abide in the shade of the Almighty ... Because you cling to me I will deliver you; because you know my name I will set you on high. You will call upon me and I will answer; I will be with you in distress; I will deliver you and give you honor. With length of days I will satisfy you, and fill you with my saving power."

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