

“The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” The prophecy made by Malachi long ago would be fulfilled in a way he never would have expected. The Lord would come to his temple, not as a purifying fire, but as a little child brought there by his parents some forty days after his birth. One purpose of doing so was to fulfill the ritual purification following childbirth. The other purpose was also to fulfill the requirements of the Mosaic Law relating to the redemption of the first-born male. It was done out of a long standing practice of recognizing that the first born belonged to God, but parents could redeem their child by substituting a sacrificial offering, usually a lamb. Joseph and Mary make the offering of the poor. Having performed these duties they could now return to their home with their child.

The presentation of Jesus in the temple is wonderfully rich in meaning. Jesus’ whole life is being offered up to God. In a sense it is God himself who is presenting his Son to us. As we reflect on the encounters with the ancient Simeon and prophetess Anna we see this more clearly. Simeon had been waiting for this moment all his life. He had been living with a promise granted to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the promised Messiah. Moved by the Holy Spirit Simeon took the child Jesus in his arms and declared those famous words that are meant for us to hear, “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 of revelation to the gentiles and for the glory of your people Israel.”

It is Jesus, dear friends, who is being presented to us as our saviour. His whole life will be offered up to God, but it will be offered up for our salvation. The parents of Jesus listen in amazement, but Simeon has more to say: “This child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed.... and a sword will pierce your own soul too.” Foreshadowed here is the suffering that will come, not only to Jesus, but to his mother also. The time will come when in his own body Jesus will make the ultimate sacrifice for the sins of

many. So at the very beginning of the Gospel, the cross is already looming on the horizon.

The elderly Anna also speaks prophetically about the child. Through Simeon and Anna, God is presenting his son to us. Simeon and Anna have spent a life-time hoping for this very moment. They represent all humanity in its longing for salvation. Their joyful welcoming of it, symbolizing by Simeon's holding the child Jesus in his arms, models for us how we are to respond to it too.

When Mary and Joseph came to the temple to offer sacrifice for the redemption of their son, they were fulfilling a requirement of their Jewish faith. It was an act of worship. They were merely rendering to God what was due to God. Rendering to another what is their due is an act of justice.

What do we owe God? Everything! God is our creator, our redeemer and our saviour! We have nothing but what he has given us. Even if we think that what we have acquired was by our own intelligence and shrewdness, it was God who had given us the mind and the capacity to achieve it. We owe God everything! We owe him our love, our gratitude, our service, our very lives!

St. Thomas Aquinas said the liturgy is the act by which we render to God what is due to God. The once-and-for-all sacrifice of Christ is represented in every Eucharist. We recall how on the cross he gave himself for us, because he loved us [Gal. 2, 20]. When we come together for worship we come to render to God what is due to God. We give God our thanks and praise. Not to give thanks and praise to God is an act of injustice. When we give to God what is his due, we become just. Our lives become properly ordered [Robert Barron]. Occasionally, we will hear someone say, "I go to Mass but I don't get anything out of it. It is boring." The reality is that the Mass is not there to entertain us. Whether we are in the mood or not, it is an act by which we render justice to God [Father Robert Barron].

We owe God everything. In today's Gospel we heard how Anna never left the temple, but worshipped there with fasting and prayer day and night. She spent all her time there. She is someone who gives her all to God. We cannot spend all

our time in church, for we have responsibilities and obligations to fulfill out in the world. Nevertheless, we are called to give our all to God. There is a prayer that many of us have learned as children, called the Morning Offering. We would say, "Lord, I offer you this day all my prayers, works, joys and sufferings in union with the holy sacrifice of the mass throughout the world," or something similar. It was a recognition that our lives are not about us and what we want. Our lives are about loving, honouring and serving God. When we align our thinking and behaviour with the mind of God and what he wants our lives become just.

As we gather here around the table of the Lord, we join our hearts and minds together with Jesus in the offering of himself to the Heavenly Father. In the marvelous exchange which is at the heart of every Eucharist, the Father gives to us his Son to be our Bread and our Life. Nourished by Him is the Life of the world, we are strengthened and sent out to present to the world its saviour. This is the significance of the Feast we celebrate today. Simeon held the child Jesus in his arms, not to attract attention to himself, but to draw our attention to the One who alone is the savior of the world. Like Simeon and Anna of old, we in our time are invited to hold, if not in our arms, then in our hearts, the One who is our saviour, and then to present him to the world in which we live, not only by speaking about him, but by the example of our lives and by doing what the Lord asks of us. And what does the Lord ask of us? Simply this: to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God [Micah 6, 8]. By living in such a manner, we reflect Him who is the light of the world and the saviour of us all.

As we celebrate Eucharist today, dear friends, let our hearts be open to receive him as Simeon once did long ago. He is the King of glory; let him enter.

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