

2. February 2022

**Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
Recognising the Messiah**

Lk 2:22-40

When the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration 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 until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised; for my eyes have seen the salvation which you have made ready in the sight of the nations; a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel. As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce your soul too so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.' There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Forty days after the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord, the liturgy presents us once again with the Child Jesus and his parents. Before the liturgical reform after the Second Vatican Council, the Christmas Season lasted until this date. Even now there are churches that keep the crib until this feast.

Jesus' parents, faithful observers of the Law, brought Jesus to Jerusalem to consecrate him to the Lord and offer his sacrifice. Thus the meeting with the old man Simeon, in whom the Holy Spirit was present, took place, as the Gospel tells us. This statement tells us a great lot about this person, for it means that he lived in all the grace that already in the time of the Old Covenant was at work in the righteous. In the light of this Spirit he was able to recognise Jesus as the Messiah. This is decisive, for it is God Himself who reveals to Simeon the identity of this Child: He is the Saviour of Israel!

We too, moved by the Holy Spirit, recognise who Jesus really is and what distinguishes him from other prophets and wise men (1 Cor 12:3). Even if it is natural for us to believe in Jesus as the Son of God, because we have been brought up in faith, this knowledge is the work of the Holy Spirit. Through faith something is revealed to us that is still hidden to many. If we ourselves have experienced what it means to recognise the Lord in the Holy Spirit, or if we have witnessed the moment when others have recognised Him, then we know the joy that fills the heart at that moment and the changes that take place in the life of the one who encounters Jesus.

When Simeon took the Child in his arms, he uttered these wonderful words, which we pray every night at Compline: "Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord..." What must have happened inside Simeon to enable him to recognise Jesus for who He is? In any case, I would also like to interpret it as a promise to the people of Israel that even in the "old age" of their journey with God they will recognise the One who came to save his people and the whole world.

Mary and Joseph's amazement shows us that they were learning more and more about Jesus, both from what he himself did or said and from what others said about him.

Addressing Mary, Simeon spoke other very significant words about Jesus: *"he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed and a sword will pierce your soul too so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare..."*

In these words the decision that the Coming of Jesus brings is evident. The encounter with Him brings man out of his indifference and confronts him with the great truth, which now has a concrete face. Is Jesus the Son of God or is He not? If the answer is yes, then I must listen to Him and follow Him. If it is negative, I

simply reduce the encounter with Him to just another event in my life and nothing changes.

But in fact, this is where the intentions of the heart are revealed, for in taking sides with regard to Jesus it will become clear whether I am really seeking the truth, whether I correspond to the deepest dimension of my humanity and whether I am seeking God. The Lord himself made this clear when he said to the Jews who were arguing with him: *"If God were your Father, you would love me. I have not come in my own name, but He has sent me. Why do you not understand what I am saying? Because you are not able to hear my word."* (Jn 8:42-43).

Here the thoughts of men are revealed! Of course, in order to do so, it is necessary to have had an encounter with Jesus. Some have not even heard of Him; others are engaged in another religion, which might even warn against Him (Judaism), or which does not recognise the true identity of Jesus (Islam), or which simply includes Him in its own belief system, without understanding the uniqueness of His Person (Hinduism or Buddhism).

It remains a mystery that we have received the grace to recognise Jesus, while others have not. Only God knows why, and we should not try to understand it too much, for that would only lead to confusion.

However, having come to know the Messiah, we are entrusted with a greater responsibility. And this responsibility will be all the greater the more we know Him. A love should burn within us that impels us to proclaim this Messiah, whom many are still waiting for.

This burning love is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who together with us seeks to bring people to an encounter with Christ. This encounter can take place in many ways. What we must be very clear about is that the Lord came into the world to save men and lead them back to the Heavenly Father's House.

This great mission is the arduous task which has been entrusted to the Church, far above all other co-operative endeavours.

To relativise this mission or to renounce it would be to fail to fulfil the Lord's command: *"Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."* (Mt 28:19-20)