

2. February 2020

“Presentation of the Lord”

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. Some popular customs prolonged the Christmas season until this date, so that even today in certain places the crib is maintained so long.

Jesus' parents, faithful followers of the Law, took Jesus to Jerusalem to consecrate

him to the Lord and to offer their sacrifice. Thus, the meeting with the aged Simeon took place, on whom the Holy Spirit rested, as the text indicates. This affirmation tells us a lot about this man, since it means that he lived in all the grace that was already effective for the faithful believers in the Old Testament. In the light of the Holy Spirit, he was able to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. This is decisive, for it is God himself who reveals to Simeon the identity of this Child: He is the Savior of Israel!

In the Holy Spirit, we too recognize who Jesus really is, and what distinguishes him from other prophets or wise men. Even if, from childhood, we already believe in Jesus as the Son of God, because we have been brought up in faith, this is a work of the Holy Spirit. By faith, we can know something that many do not know. If we ourselves have experienced what it means to recognize the Lord in the Holy Spirit, or have witnessed the moment when others recognized Him, then we know the joy that fills the heart at that moment and the transformations that take place in the life of the one who meets Jesus.

When Simeon took the child in his arms, he spoke these wonderful words, which we recite every evening in the prayer of Compline: *Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word...*

What must have happened inside Simeon when he recognized Jesus for what He is? In any case, I would also like to interpret it as a prophecy for the people of Israel, that even in the "old age" of their way with God, they will recognize the One who came to save his People and the whole world.

The amazement of Mary and Joseph shows us that they learned more and more about Jesus, both through Himself and from what others said about him.

Addressing Mary, Simeon said other very significant words about Jesus: *"Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed (...) so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare."*

In these words the decision, that the coming of Jesus brings with it, becomes evident. The encounter with Him leads man out of his indifference and places him before 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 one more event in my life and no change happens.

But, in fact, here the secret thoughts of the hearts are laid bare, for by taking a stand with respect to Jesus it will be shown whether I truly search the truth, whether I correspond to the deepest dimension of my humanity, and whether I seek God. The Lord Himself made this clear when he said to the Jews who argued 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).

This is how the secret thoughts of men are revealed! Of course, to do so, it is necessary to have had a real encounter with Jesus. Many people have never heard anything about Him; others are already attached to another religion, which might even warn against Him (Judaism), or which does not recognize Jesus' true identity (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 recognize Jesus, while others have not. Only God knows why, and it is not worth giving too much thought to the matter to pretend to understand or judge it, for this would only lead to confusion.

But it does increase the responsibility that arises from having recognized the Messiah. And the more we know him, the more that responsibility will grow. There should be a love burning within us that leads us to announce this Messiah, whom many are still waiting for.

This burning love is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who together with us seeks people to lead them to Christ! This encounter can happen in many ways. What we must be very clear about is that the Lord has come into the world to redeem people and to lead them home to our heavenly Father.

The fulfillment of this great mission is the arduous task entrusted to the Church, far beyond any cooperation for the social development of humanity. To relativize this mission or even abandon it would be to no longer fulfill the Lord's command: *"Therefore go to all nations and make them my disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"*. (Mt 28,19-20).