

Commentary on the Presentation of the Lord

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord: He Shared Fully in Our Humanity



Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. This feast returns us to the Christmas season focusing in on the person of the Lord. Jesus is seen as a child, presented to the priests according to the law of Moses. You may remember that the final plague upon the Egyptians to force them to let the children of Israel go was the killing of the first born. The Angel of Death came into Egypt, but passed over the children of Israel. Since the first born of the children of Israel were spared the plague, they were seen as belonging to the Lord. The Book of Exodus refined this in chapter 13 vs 2 to the first born male. By Jesus' day, parents whose first child was a boy would go to the Temple with the appropriate offering to present their child to the Lord. That is what Mary and Joseph were doing in Temple. This would be an occasion for celebration. Every child is loved and celebrated, but the first child transforms the couple, husband and wife, into a family.

The child who is presented in the gospel is more than the joy of his parents; He is the joy of the world. Although the Church usually refers the first reading from Malachi to John the Baptist, in the case of the Presentation, it is Anna and Simeon who are the precursors, the ones who go before the Lord preparing his way. Simeon and Anna are ready to go to their graves in peace because they have touched God's redemption for his people. This child is different from all the others. This child is the Lord.

Hebrews, the second reading, emphasizes that the child presented not only is the Son of God, but is a human being. He had a full share of blood and flesh. He was tempted, and he suffered. A while back

some theologians asked whether Jesus' divine knowledge of himself would prevent him from experiencing humanity as we do. The answer to this is found in the First Letter of Peter: "He emptied himself of his humanity, becoming one of us in all things but sin."

We have in Jesus One who has the power of God because he is the Son of God. We have in Jesus one who has the power to bring God's peace into our lives. Still, we have in Jesus one who is as we are. He wept when his friend Lazarus died. He laughed when he called those noisy lovable twerps, James and John, Sons of Thunder. He was afraid during the Agony of the Garden. He was enraged at evil. He suffered and died for us.

Jesus is the First Paraclete, the perfect intercessor with the Power of God. From this flow two important conclusions: There is nothing that we can share with Him that he has not personally experienced, except that he did not experience sin, of course. He is One of us. Second, there is nothing that He cannot do to heal our problems. He is God among us, Emmanuel.

Today's feast helps us fight against the tendency we all have to drift into the deism of the eighteenth century. The deists believed that they were too far removed from God for God to be intimately concerned with them. We all have the tendency to join the deist way of thinking. We err when, so often, we think that God really can't be concerned with us. "Why should the infinite God be concerned with our little problems?" we ask. To this I ask, "Are you concerned with your children's problems, even if your children are tiny?" Of course you are. If that is the case, then we can understand how much more God is concerned with our difficulties. He not only loves us; He fills us with His life. We are infinitely more important to God than our children are important to us.

Today's feast reminds us that God is not removed from us in His very being. Jesus, is in effect, one of us. He knows; He cares; He has experienced, and He loves.

Today's feast leads us to pray:

"Jesus you are one of us yet you are infinite God. Heal our weakness and our pain. Give us the joy of your peace. Help us to rely on your power. Fill us with your love. You are not just any child presented in the Temple. You are the Son of God. You bear the power of God. You are also one of us. Care for us who share the burden of life and who unite our joys and suffering to your life. You are the Intercessor par excellence. You are a human being and the Son of God. Help us to rely on your love and presence in our lives and before the throne of your Father, Amen."

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