

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Dec 30th 2017

Why should I make any New Year's Resolutions? I never keep them.

A New Beginning, with a New Relationship with Jesus

In the first reading for today, John addresses several different audiences: Fathers, young men, and children. Our perspectives and needs change as we move through the social ladder. Isn't it fascinating that even with the same anchoring beliefs, we reflect those beliefs differently depending on where we are in our journey? Such has been true throughout human history. Often we simply are not cognizant of the struggles that we share with our ancestors until we age through some of them. Youngsters, take note. Your parents struggled much like you did, too.

In John's message, fathers (and mothers, too) are asked to continue their bedrock commitments. Young men (and young women, too) are asked to continue in their youthful strength and enthusiasm. And the children — those who have yet to become fully formed and mature — are nevertheless embraced for their faith. Here is where sometimes we oldsters presume advantage and perhaps miss out of the contributions from the youngest among us.

My grandson Eli is now three years old. When he was only two, he was watching my daughter cleaning their house. While dusting shelves, she placed some family pictures on the floor, where Eli could see them. One of those pictures was my own father, a rock in my life and the source of great strength for all of our family. He had passed away soon after Eli was born. Little Eli, unable yet to speak, pulled on his mother's skirt. He pointed to my father's picture, pointed upward to heaven, and then made the sign of the cross. Yes, Eli, we hope your great grandfather is in heaven, praying for you — that is, after all, what his good mother had been teaching him. These little ones know more than we give them credit. Do not underestimate the power of your words and example, but also do not underestimate their prayers and contributions to our collective wellbeing. They are members of Christ's body, too.

Today's gospel places us in the temple, where Mary and Joseph took their baby son. First, the baby Jesus receives the testimony of Simeon, who prophesies the significance of his life. Then, as emphasized in today's reading, the prophetess Anna confirms this prophecy as she exemplifies the patience of those who wait upon God for the fulfillment of His covenant. Married for seven years until the premature death of her own husband, she waited in prayer for 84 years in her widowhood, seeking after God. Anna found what she had been waiting for in the little bundle of joy held by Mary and her husband, Joseph. It is a surreal picture — this long term of waiting, punctuated by the supreme joy of realizing that the promise awaited for had been kept. She somehow understood that this child would be the culmination of all those ancient promises. Yet others had no clue.

These stories remind me that my own faith is often so tepid, and my patience often so thin. Grant us, Lord, that we might awaken during this Christmas Season to make our own souls permeable to your light and to your warming presence. We do not yet know how to pray and how to live according to your will. The witness of your prophets and the witness of the baby born in a manger provide a beacon each year to the entire world. Thanks be to God.

