

Reflection for Candle Mass: The Presentation Of Christ in the temple.

Gospel Reading Luke 2:22-40

Jesus Is Presented in the Temple

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord'), and they offered a sacrifice according to what is stated in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons.'

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; this man was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation 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 before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, '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 for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.'

And the child's father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him.

Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, 'This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your own soul too.'

There was also a prophet, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, having lived with her husband for seven years after her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer night and day. At that moment she came and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

The Return to Nazareth

When they had finished everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

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May I just encourage you to pause for a moment and consider today's rather long Gospel story from Luke:

The old man Simeon has spent his life in the temple waiting to find his messiah, who knows for how many years Simeon had stood in hopeful expectation – the eyes of his heart straining to glimpse the son of the living God walking into the temple courtyard.

Simeon waited amongst the crowds that came and went, their faces swimming in and out of focus as he continued his vigil amongst the anxious – the desolate – the proud and the happy – Young fathers buying sacrifices hoping to receive some kind of purification and to give thanks for their new family's and mothers, carrying their precious new-borns – their little gifts from God, to be presented to God for his blessing.

It's as one such group moved through the crowd that Simeon steps forward.

There's nothing truth be told to distinguish this little family from any another. Certainly, they come without pomp and circumstance, just a man, a woman and a baby – and the most humble of offerings.

Yet as he moves towards them Simeon is sure.

THIS what he has waited for all his life and he takes the infant into his arms and praises God.

In that moment, amongst the grandeur of the temple walls, the commotion and noise of the busy courtyard, Simeon recognises the fulfilment of all those scriptures he had spent his life studying and that fulfilment comes not in the youthful glow of some strong handsome warrior but in the face and the eyes of a helpless baby boy.

It would have been so easy to miss that family in the crowds...so easy to doubt that God's answer, the hope of Israel, might lie in that tiny fragile body wouldn't it!

I wonder if Simeon was for a moment a little baffled. He had waited for so long – had such high hopes – and now God's answer was this baby....Hard to believe that here could be, in truth, the hope of the world. Baffled or not Simeon saw it... yet I wonder how often we fail to see God in our own lives.

As I thought about my own life while reading this gospel story, I wondered how many times as I run around doing all the stuff I have to do for the church that I've failed to recognise Jesus' in the eyes of another, or failed to hear the whisper of his spirit because of the noise of my own life.

Unlike Simeon who recognised Jesus instantly. I wonder how we miss the moment of connection, of communion with God who walks beside us every single day because our gaze is turned elsewhere, or because God moves in ways, we don't really expect him to?

There are a thousand things we could think about and question about today's reading but I think that's a fairly good one to start with isn't it?

To open our hearts and our minds to fact that God meets with us every day we just don't always see it.

Simeon was faithful trusting that he would one day meet God. And then one day he did, just not in the way he or the world had dared to imagine.

I don't really know what's going on in any of your lives and neither you, mine right now, we are all being separated from one-another and challenged at the moment in a myriad of different ways, so it probably wouldn't do any of us much harm to stop for a moment and see if we can recognise Jesus walking beside us as we stumble on.

There are two things I'm going to take away from this story today and I would ask you to consider them too.

The first is that we will only grow closer to God if we are like Simeon and Anna and have hearts that are hearts of trust, patience and faithfulness always seeking a glimpse of God in our lives each day.

And the second is this, that no matter the chaos and noise of our lives, nothing can ever take away the fact that God is love and he has come to us to bring us comfort and hope.

When Simeon gazed un-expectantly down into the face of Jesus he saw the God of love in the eyes of that tiny child staring back at him, it was that same child that chose to die in our place and it is that same passionate love that still rings true for us in the here and now... the God of love is the same yesterday, today and forever.

So this morning, as you finish watching today's service on you tube or finish reading this reflection over your morning coffee thinking about going back to the demands of our everyday lives. May we all above all other things, go knowing that with only the slightest seed of faith, you will find God in the most unexpected places, and where we find God, we will find hope and perhaps even a little strength knowing that as Simeon wrapped his arms that infant Jesus. That very same Jesus the resurrected Son of God is wrapping his arms of love and grace peacefully around you.

So whatever the rest of the day or tomorrow throws at you, remember that you are never alone. We are held in love, and love my friends always wins, Christs love conquers all and always will!
Happy Candlemas day. Amen.

Fr Murray