

**Feast of the Presentation of the Lord (A)**  
**February 2, 2014.**

*When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (Lk. 2:22).*

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord and acknowledge Him as *a light for revelation to the Gentiles and glory of Israel*. This Feast brings to completion our joyful celebration of the Feast of the Nativity of the Lord. The candles that we blessed and that we will use in our homes when we pray are a reminder of the truth of Christ; that He is the light of the world. *I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life (Jn. 8:12).*

There is a formality to the events recounted in the Gospel. Our Lady and St. Joseph take Jesus to the Temple that the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law might be fulfilled. They duly make their offering and in the course of what was a liturgical celebration, they receive further knowledge about this Child; destined to be both *a light of revelation to the Gentiles and glory of Israel* and *a sign to be contradicted*. Here there is both light and darkness, both joy and consternation. *Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother... 'and you yourself a sword will pierce – so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed' (Lk. 2:33-35).*

The chiaroscuro of this scene expresses a Mystery still to be unfolded; as it will be in the course of the Child's life and especially in His Passion and Death. It is the unfolding of the Mystery of the Redemptive Incarnation, at work also in our lives. Because of His Incarnation, Jesus offers to all of us and to each one of us individually the possibility of being made partners in this Mystery. He desires to associate us with His redeeming sacrifice; and as the Gospel reveals to us, He does this with *those who were to be its first beneficiaries. This is achieved supremely in the case of his mother, who was associated more intimately than any other person in the mystery of his redemptive suffering (Catechism of the Catholic Church, # 618). Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel. And to be a sign that will be contradicted – and you yourself a sword will pierce – so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed (Lk. 2: 34-35).* Simeon's words presage our Lady's share in the Passion, a glimpse on Calvary, when the rejection of Jesus by sinners will bear heavily on His Mother as it does even now on her sorrowful and Immaculate Heart.

If we are to come to a greater understanding of what took place in the Temple, and profit from this Feast, first, we must be very clear about the purpose of the Holy Family's visit to the Temple. They went to fulfill the prescribed rites *according to the Law of Moses* as we do when we come to Mass on Sunday and keep the third commandment: *Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy*. More importantly however and ultimately more significantly, our Lady and St. Joseph went to the Temple to adore God and to render to Him what we as creatures owe Him in all justice. The virtue of religion disposes us to have this same attitude. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches us that *adoration is the first act of the virtue of religion. To adore God is to acknowledge Him as God, as the Creator and Saviour, the Lord and Master of everything that exists, as infinite merciful Love (# 2096).* It further explains that *the worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world (# 2097).*

It is abundantly evident that where God is worshipped *in spirit and in truth* (Jn. 4: 22) man is indeed free for his choices are directed towards God, our beatitude; and so to be religious in this sense, means that we endeavour to make our choices always in view of our ultimate good. We might call this an eschatological approach to life; a perspective that is never deprived of our ultimate goal or end. In the prophetic literature and unbroken tradition of our faith, there is a constant call to conversion and the injunction to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Cf. Lk. 12:31). The messenger of the covenant spoken of by the Prophet Malachi is the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the King of Glory whose entry into the Father's Temple we commemorate today. He is the Covenant and *in Him we live and move and have our being* (Acts 17:28).

In the course of His life on earth, in the unfolding of the Mystery of His Redemptive Incarnation our Lord spoke of the prince of this world and of his defeat. *Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out; and I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself* (Jn. 12:31-32). Until such time, that the Kingdom of God is fully established however, we continue to battle against the ruler of this world knowing that only *the worship of the one God sets man free from turning in on himself, from the slavery of sin and the idolatry of the world*. And unless we worship the one God in spirit and in truth, we risk falling into idolatry not only of the world but of the self. We become our own gods.

For centuries now, an ever more common ignoring of God, a refusal even to acknowledge His existence has hardened into habit. Many are oblivious of God, wilfully so; and many as the Prophet Hosea says, are destroyed from lack of this knowledge. How chilling his words: *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge; because you have rejected knowledge, I reject you from being a priest to me. And since you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children* (Hosea 4:6). How can a priest, a father, not weep over the loss of so many today? The end product of irreligion is a purposeless existence; souls desert-like in barrenness, bereft of the knowledge of their Heavenly Father and of their destiny. These are the legion of souls in our day unacquainted with the graces, lights and consolations which follow upon such knowledge. In any given day the international media provide us with too many tales of woe; of wanton, self-destructive behaviour, the result of this obliviousness of God. The appalling consequences of godlessness are daily more evident. These are souls in the grip of *the one who has the power of death, that is the devil; souls held in slavery by the fear of death*" (Heb. 2:14-15). We hear also of diabolical infestation and possession, not glamorised and fictionalised but of real and disturbing events. Why does God, permit this to happen? In His infinite mercy He permits us to see in these events what too many have become: forsaken of all grace, deprived of God's love. Who will have compassion on them except those who understand that sin leads to misery and must be expiated if there is to be order on earth and wellbeing among us.

*Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted* (Lk. 2: 34). The Church is no less a sign of contradiction, but only when she is faithful to her Lord and Saviour. *Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets* (Lk. 6:26). Increasingly, in a world that continues along its dizzying downward spiral away from God and the things of God, we have indeed become a sign of contradiction. We need His grace and strength to sustain us. From this holy Temple our Lord is saying to us: *Walk while you have the light, lest the darkness overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light,*

*that you may become sons of light (Jn. 12:35-36). Yes, this is our task. You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hid. Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it give light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Mt. 5:14-16).*

We have come together to celebrate the Feast of our Lord's Presentation. Like our Lady and St. Joseph we too are performing a liturgical act but in a manner that is very different for our Lord Jesus Christ *has obtained a ministry which is much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises (Heb. 8:6).* Let us be mindful that in a liturgical celebration the Church is always servant in the image of her Lord. *In the New Testament the word liturgy refers not only to the celebration of divine worship but also to the proclamation of the Gospel and to active charity (Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1070).*

When we come together to worship God, yes, we are fulfilling the Law but in reality our Lord Jesus Christ comes to meet His believing people (Cf. Blessing of Candles, Feast of the Presentation of the Lord; *The Roman Missal*) as He did with the Prophet Simeon and the Prophetess Anna. Like them let us proclaim the salvation that is ours in Christ the Saviour and persevere in the worship of the one God for *the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such the Father seeks to worship him (Jn. 4: 22-23).*