

40 Days after Christmas, February 2nd, the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation to commemorate the day that Jesus' parents, faithful to the law of Moses, take him to the temple in Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. So today we take a moment to step out of Ordinary time mode and to revisit Christmas. When we look at the readings for Mass today we should see a bit of a contradiction between the Old Testament prophecy from Malachi and the actual event as it plays out when Jesus is presented in the temple. Malachi envisions the Lord coming to the Jerusalem temple and this appearance of God will be an awesome and awe inspiring event, a purifying event, refiner's fire that will burn away all impurities.

However, when we look at our Gospel, we actually see the Lord come to his temple and it is somewhat more subdued. A simple couple brings their little boy, accompanied by the minimal sacrificial offering, the offering of the poor, two young pigeons or turtledoves. Generally speaking the little ones do not make much of an impression on us. Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus, their presence in the temple would hardly have been noticed. And yet we have the two holy prophets, Simeon and Anna who approach the family. And pointing out Jesus they announce him to be the Messiah, to be the one for whom their people Israel were waiting. In fact Simeon takes the child in his arms, and embracing him declares that he has come to see and to know all that is necessary now. "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..." For my eyes have seen your salvation. What did Simeon see that was, most likely, to everyone else so ordinary?

The feast of the Presentation is often associated with light. This is the traditional day for the blessing of candles. We also pray today for all those in consecrated life who have dedicated themselves to the service of the Lord. The light of God has entered his temple. The late Father Henri de Lubac, one of the great theologians of the 20th century once wrote, "the purer the light the less it compels us" (repeat). The prophecy of Malachi was of a light that was compelling, forceful, with the power to purify by fire. But when the pure light of God comes it doesn't quite manifest itself with such oomph. It takes a profound holiness to see it, or more appropriately to see Him, to see and recognize Jesus.

After receiving the baby Jesus in his arms, the prophet Simeon turns towards Mary and says to her, "This child is destined for the falling and 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." (Repeat) This child is going to cause you great pain, not the greatest words of encouragement for a new Mother. Why will a sword pierce Mary's soul? Because she will walk with him on the path of redemption, will walk with him on the journey of the cross. She will share in her Son's suffering, in the suffering of the redemption. In a sense his suffering will become her suffering.

And so it is this love that is the real pure light of God that purifies us, refines us, turns us into pure gold. The most profound holiness is born when we are able to walk compassionately with others in their pain, to walk compassionately with Jesus as he carries the cross. And because this love asks us to let go of our self-centeredness, because it burns away our self-absorption it causes pain. The love of God is a pure love, it is a pure light but as such it will not compel us to act. But all the same it is a powerful love, a powerful purifying force, in pain it will refine us as we humbly open our hearts to receive mercy, to receive a love which cleanses us of our selfishness and self-absorption, cleanses us of our sin.