



Feast of the Presentation of the Lord 2 February 2025

Reflection by Mgr Daniel McHugh

The light in a dark world

On Monday this week we remembered the 80th Anniversary of the Liberation of Auschwitz. A number of years ago I was hosted with a friend by a young priest from Poland and we went to visit that Concentration Camp: it was an eerie place that I will never forget, a symbol of evil that remains in our world still today. We were privileged when there to visit the cell of St Maximilian Maria Kolbe who volunteered to take the place of a family man due to die in the death camp. For us priests especially he is an inspiration, a witness by a priest to the way Jesus himself took.

The wonderful Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is very much a day to celebrate the light of Christ in a world where there is so much darkness.

The Loyola Press commentary Sunday Connection describes the background to the Gospel for the Feast like this:

“Today the Church celebrates the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. The Presentation, which is celebrated 40 days after Christmas, is not mentioned in the other Gospels. Only Luke tells the story, most likely because he writes for Gentile Christians who are not familiar with the Jewish rite of presentation and purification. In addition, the intent of Luke’s Gospel is to show that God’s promise to Israel, fulfilled in Jesus, extends to the Gentiles. Luke recognises Joseph and Mary as faithful Jews who bring Jesus to the Temple in Jerusalem. Here they present their firstborn son to the Lord. Jesus is thus consecrated as required by the Law of Moses. Present in the Temple at the time are Simeon and Anna, both are awaiting the restoration of God’s rule in Israel. Simeon had been promised by the Holy Spirit that he would see Christ the Lord, the Messiah, before he died. The holy man immediately recognised the infant Jesus as the promised Saviour, a “light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel”. Anna also recognised Jesus as the fulfilment of the promise of redemption and spoke about him to all.”

This year we are blessed to have the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord celebrated on a Sunday and so the whole Catholic Community can celebrate the Feast together. Particularly happy is the Rite of the Blessing of Candles and the Procession at the beginning of the Mass. For us it is an opportunity to celebrate and proclaim with the old man, the Prophet Simeon, the child Jesus as “a light for the revelation to the Gentiles, and for the glory of.....Israel”. The Procession with Blessed Candles has an interesting history. It was Pope Sergius I (8th Century Pope from the East) who introduced the Latin Hymn ‘Lumen ad Revelationem’ (a light for revelation) and the Antiphon Nunc Dimittis

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(now you can let your servant go in peace) to the Roman Rite. These were translations from the Greek. It was in France in the 10th century that the Solemn Blessing of the Candles for the Procession was introduced; and a century later the Antiphon, *Lumen ad Revelationem* and the Canticle of Simeon were cojoined. For us today this Ritual is the joyful way we celebrate Christ as our light 'our way' in a world where there is so much darkness.

The 'way' that the child Jesus took involved the Cross and sacrifice as Simeon prophesied to Mary in his words "*a sword will pierce your own soul too.*" When Mary offered her child in the Temple it was an offering that was joyful but also had the element of renunciation, the way of sacrifice. When we participate in the Eucharist on this Feast we embrace the way of Mary, the Way of Jesus, the way of offering and sacrifice. I have no doubt that when King Charles lit a candle at the Holocaust Memorial and stood in silent reflection and prayer he would have dedicated his life to following that way too: incarnated in the way of service to humanity.

In the Gospel for the Feast of the Presentation we are told by St Luke that together with Simeon was the Prophetess Anna who was present at that moment and "*she began to give thanks to God and to speak of the child to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem*". The communication of the good news of Jesus the light of the world is the most important and challenging task of the Church today and everyone is involved, everyone has a part to play. I noted this past week that Pope Francis was addressing those involved in 'communications' on behalf of the Church. One of the things he said to them was: "*Tell stories that nourish life*". He said "*be courageous truth and hope-tellers in our world marred by conflicts, division and misinformation.*" He was speaking in the context of the Jubilee Year with its focus on Hope. "*Telling hope*" he said "*means allowing people to hope against hope (...) and having a gaze that transforms things, making them what they could and should be.*"

We ask the prayers of Our Blessed Lady on this Feast that we too may ponder all these things in our heart. We ask the prayers of Anna the Prophetess that we may tell the good news that we see around us of Jesus changing peoples' lives for the better.

We ask the prayers of Simeon that we may have the gaze of Jesus who encourages us to reject racism and ethnic division, so as to carry the light for all humanity created and loved by God.

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