Purification(2024)

**ANNOUNC EMENTS**:

To those following very ancient custom today—okay, yesterday the second-- was the very last day of Christmastide. Its forty-day period nicely matches Lent. We are remembering "Christ's Presentation in the Temple", which before Vatican II was commonly known as (and by our PB also) the "Purification of Mary". It also anciently has been called *Candlemas*.

Ss. Simeon and Anna add an interesting overlooked aspect to our Gospel. Jesus was unknown at that point, just an infant. Hoards of people flocked the Great Temple daily. Suddenly these two well known members of the Temple community made arresting announcements about this six week old baby boy. Imagine the reaction of folks nearby! Who is this kid?? What is his name?? Who are his parents?? Nazareth???

Thus, this encounter in the Great Temple does indeed serve as a marvelous bookend. It mirrors the Christmas story which began with angels proclaiming a holy birth and also the Epiphany with the gentile magi worshiping the Jewish Christ child.

Our Gospel today deals mostly with the Holy Family's encounter with these two very holy people, Simeon and the prophetess Anna, upon bringing Jesus into the Temple. Discussion of the little liturgy dealing with Mary's ritual purification-- or as our PB calls it: *"the Churching of Women"*--only occupies a small portion of our Gospel.

Forty days after childbirth a Jewish mother, who until then had been not allowed to attend religious liturgies, came to the Temple for a ceremony and offering to God. She would offer namely a lamb and a pigeon or, if impoverished as the Holy Family was, two pigeons. Being ritually cleansed she could return to public liturgies again.

This Holy Day picked up the additional name of *Candlemas* because of the **Procession** which traditionally followed the Eucharist, or "Mass". First candles were blessed during which the *Nunc Dimittis* was chanted, and then everyone proceeded outside to the cemetery. The candles represented the "light to lighten the Gentiles and to be the glory of thy people Israel"--as Simeon proclaimed--which became an antiphon during the Procession. Upon returning into the church the *Benedictus,* the "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel" canticle from MP, was sung along with a hymn or antiphon to the Virgin Mary.

*"And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him." +*

Now there actually were **two** ceremonies accomplished by the Holy Family at the occasion of Jesus presentation in the Temple. First was Mary's **purification**, which harkens back to the *Book of Leviticus*. The second was an offering in **Redemption** of the first born son which comes from the *Book of Numbers*.

One thing manifested by this passage and others we have heard since Christmas is that Jesus was born into a devout Jewish family. Not only did Mary honor the request of the angel to bear the Son of God and give him the commanded name, but Joseph followed the urgings of angels regarding marrying, fleeing, and returning, and then together keeping the rituals**:** Jesus was circumcised on the eighth day as was traditional; his parents were wont to make a religious pilgrimage to Jerusalem each year, and now we heard how his parents kept both of the ancient ceremonies associated with childbirth.

We all know that how a child is raised greatly influences his values and perspectives of the world. Psychologists also long have agreed that **nurture** is of major importance in a child's formation.

Jesus was brought up traditionally and would naturally have learned traditional Jewish values. Thus, it was not surprising to hear two weeks back, on the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, of his attendance at a small town Jewish wedding.

Nor should it be surprising that Jesus’ first public miracle occurred at a traditional setting instead of someplace more "on the edge", more *avant garde,* say like changing lots of water into wine for a really fun time at King Herod's palace!

That Mary and Joseph did a wonderful job raising Jesus goes without doubt. Twice in the last month our Gospel readings have ended by commenting on Jesus' growth in wisdom. On the first Sunday after the Epiphany (historically called Holy Family Sunday), after returning home from wowing the Temple elders at age 12, one hears how "Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man".

Today we heard "how the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled with wisdom". If wisdom is to be sought and prized, and humans of all races and religions long have so believed, then Mary and Joseph did "a first rate job" to say the very least.

Childbirth is a chance for couples to participate in divine creation and the uniqueness of that opportunity makes it priceless. Raising a child continues the process of **creation**.

Just as the universe was not finished when God said, "let there be light", more development followed. The light was separated into day light and night time light; the planets were made, the waters separated, animals and plants were made, and man followed. One can choose to make a simple clay cup and then stop **or** one can continue fashioning the cup until it has a handle and colors and becomes a genuine work of art.

Likewise, as we all know, creating a child, son or daughter, does not end at childbirth. Indeed, the task has only begun. Besides lots of warm fuzzy feelings for mom and dad will come also sleepless nights, heartaches, broken bones, dating, and homework.

Only when our child is married off do we get to "sit on the sidelines" of our child's life. But we remain ever ready to enter the game at any moment, when really needed or necessary.

Needless to say the same is true of grand-parenting. One tries to help fashion the little one into the best person he or she can become. We make sure grandchildren get baptized and try to encourage regular church attendance and Confirmation. We help them to grow "in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man", as Jesus became.

We encourage right behavior and attitudes and critical thinking in the child while we watch the examples they might see in us. Most likely all of us have felt the shame of having our child or grandchild do something "bad" which they apparently learned from us. Your pastor remembers the horror of hearing our elder son repeating things he’d heard yelled in the car. Thus, they help **us** become a better, or at least stay, a good person. And so, the Lord Blesses **us** for our work not just with smiles.

Being reminded that parents and grandparents are both part of a grand **team** is important when one ponders the challenges and temptations the devil and the princes of the air have conjured up for children today. The list is too lengthy to recite, but one is of primary importance.

The devil tries to silence the "**still small voice**" which comes to us from the divine. The Holy Spirit makes gentle suggestions while the devil hits you in the face with a proposition. If the shepherd's voice can not be heard, the sheep will wander, thinking they really are on the right path all along.

Quite literally **noise** is a tool used to silence the Holy Spirit in someone's life. Abp. Fulton J. Sheen once remarked that the type of music one likes is the type already in one’s soul. (I find this very depressing when pondering the type of music people today surround themselves with.) Choral music might be fine for an hour or so on Sundays **but** who wants to be surrounded by angelic sounds when trying to figure out on Monday how to edge out somebody for a promotion?!

Or perhaps we may have experienced this**:** relaxing at a quiet lake when someone arrives nearby with a boom box (sorry to show my age). Too much quiet enables reflection, the shepherd's voice might yet be heard, and the devil just can NOT allow that.

About six years back there were many commemorations about the end of the "War to end all wars", the Great War, the Forgotten War, the First World War. That war has been written about by many folk with more degrees than I. It is has been pointed that WWI ended the medieval era with the destruction of three of Europe's royal families, plus the Sultanate of the Ottomans, along with the end of England's powerful aristocracy and the universal sense of **glory** in warfare.

But, as far as I know, unwritten is how much quieter the world of February 1914 was. One did not have to escape to the woods to find quiet. Quiet was pretty much the natural state of things outside of a factory.

Almost no one had a telephone that brought in the outside world. One still only could speak to those within earshot. The victrola or phonograph record was in its infancy so one had to seek out harmonious sounds at churches or recital halls, or make it himself.

One could not take sound with him since the transistor radio was still forty years away, and the IPod almost a hundred. And the source of double sensory stimulation perfect at keeping ones mind very far from all that **quie**t, namely talking pictures, was still about a decade out, to say nothing of television or the Internet.

Golf carts brought noise to a stroll in a park. Horns, jets and helicopters can rattle any quiet evening. Visiting a National Park or even Mt. Everest these days is rarely about quiet and serenity. About the only place left today where quiet can be counted on is either out at sea, very deep in the woods or in a monastery. But even in those places-- since sound now travels in tiny gadgets--one never knows.

Nonetheless, the voice of the Lord needs to be heard **before** it is felt. As C.S. Lewis put it in his classic "*The Problem of Pain*", that pain is God's way of finally getting our attention.

Thus, church attendance and daily prayer are a finger in the eye to Satan's plans to keep one from pondering God. For ourselves and those in our care both should be encouraged, **along** with reading more and listening less. Much more is possible, but with just these four (prayer, church, reading, and quiet) one will be able one to hear the urgings of a small voice trying to keep us on the right path to paradise, instead of "erring and straying like lost sheep" following "too much the devices and desires of our own hearts". Amen. +