



The Holy See

HOLY MASS FOR RELIGIOUS
ON THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

WORLD DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS BENEDICT XVI

*Vatican Basilica
Thursday, 2 February 2006*

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Today's Feast of Jesus' Presentation at the temple 40 days after his birth places before our eyes a special moment in the life of the Holy Family: Mary and Joseph, in accordance with Mosaic law, took the tiny Jesus to the temple of Jerusalem to offer him to the Lord (cf. *Lk 2: 22*). Simeon and Anna, inspired by God, recognized that Child as the long-awaited Messiah and prophesied about him. We are in the presence of a mystery, both simple and solemn, in which Holy Church celebrates Christ, the Anointed One of the Father, the firstborn of the new humanity.

The evocative candlelight procession at the beginning of our celebration has made us relive the majestic entrance, as we sang in the Responsorial Psalm, of the One who is "the King of glory", "the Lord, mighty in battle" (*Ps 24[23]: 7, 8*). But who is the powerful God who enters the temple? It is a Child; it is the Infant Jesus in the arms of his Mother, the Virgin Mary. The Holy Family was complying with what the Law prescribed: the purification of the mother, the offering of the firstborn child to God and his redemption through a sacrifice.

In the First Reading the Liturgy speaks of the oracle of the Prophet Malachi: "The Lord... will suddenly come to his temple" (*Mal 3: 1*). These words communicated the full intensity of the desire that had given life to the expectation of the Jewish People down the centuries. "The angel of the

Covenant" at last entered his house and submitted to the Law: he came to Jerusalem to enter God's house in an attitude of obedience.

The meaning of this act acquires a broader perspective in the passage from the Letter to the Hebrews, proclaimed as the Second Reading today. Christ, the mediator who unites God and man, abolishing distances, eliminating every division and tearing down every wall of separation, is presented to us here.

Christ comes as a new "merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people" (*Heb 2: 17*). Thus, we note that mediation with God no longer takes place in the holiness-separation of the ancient priesthood, but in liberating solidarity with human beings.

While yet a Child, he sets out on the path of obedience that he was to follow to the very end. The Letter to the Hebrews highlights this clearly when it says: "In the days of his earthly life Jesus offered up prayers and supplications... to him who was able to save him from death.... Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (cf. *Heb 5: 7-9*).

The first person to be associated with Christ on the path of obedience, proven faith and shared suffering was his Mother, Mary. The Gospel text portrays her in the act of offering her Son: an unconditional offering that involves her in the first person.

Mary is the Mother of the One who is "the glory of [his] people Israel" and a "light for revelation to the Gentiles", but also "a sign that is spoken against" (cf. *Lk 2: 32, 34*). And in her immaculate soul, she herself was to be pierced by the sword of sorrow, thus showing that her role in the history of salvation did not end in the mystery of the Incarnation but was completed in loving and sorrowful participation in the death and Resurrection of her Son.

Bringing her Son to Jerusalem, the Virgin Mother offered him to God as a true Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. She held him out to Simeon and Anna as the proclamation of redemption; she presented him to all as a light for a safe journey on the path of truth and love.

The words that came to the lips of the elderly Simeon: "My eyes have seen your salvation" (*Lk 2: 30*), are echoed in the heart of the prophetess Anna. These good and devout people, enveloped in Christ's light, were able to see in the Child Jesus "the consolation of Israel" (*Lk 2: 25*). So it was that their expectation was transformed into a light that illuminates history.

Simeon was the bearer of an ancient hope and the Spirit of the Lord spoke to his heart: for this reason he could contemplate the One whom numerous prophets and kings had desired to see: Christ, light of revelation for the Gentiles.

He recognized that Child as the Saviour, but he foresaw in the Spirit that the destinies of humanity would be played out around him and that he would have to suffer deeply from those who rejected him; he proclaimed the identity and mission of the Messiah with words that form one of the hymns of the newborn Church, radiant with the full communitarian and eschatological exultation of the fulfilment of the expectation of salvation. The enthusiasm was so great that to live and to die were one and the same, and the "light" and "glory" became a universal revelation.

Anna is a "prophetess", a wise and pious woman who interpreted the deep meaning of historical events and of God's message concealed within them. Consequently, she could "give thanks to God" and "[speak of the Child] to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem" (*Lk 2: 38*). Her long widowhood devoted to worship in the temple, fidelity to weekly fasting and participation in the expectation of those who yearned for the redemption of Israel culminated in her meeting with the Child Jesus.

Dear brothers and sisters, on this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord the Church is celebrating the Day of Consecrated Life. This is an appropriate occasion to praise the Lord and thank him for the precious gift represented by the consecrated life in its different forms; at the same time it is an incentive to encourage in all the People of God knowledge and esteem for those who are totally consecrated to God.

Indeed, just as Jesus' life in his obedience and dedication to the Father is a living parable of the "God-with-us", so the concrete dedication of consecrated persons to God and to their brethren becomes an eloquent sign for today's world of the presence of God's Kingdom.

Your way of living and working can vividly express full belonging to the one Lord; placing yourselves without reserve in the hands of Christ and of the Church is a strong and clear proclamation of God's presence in a language understandable to our contemporaries. This is the first service that the consecrated life offers to the Church and to the world. Consecrated persons are like watchmen among the People of God who perceive and proclaim the new life already present in our history.

I now address you in a special way, dear brothers and sisters who have embraced the vocation of special consecration, to greet you with affection and thank you warmly for your presence.

I extend a special greeting to Archbishop Franc Rodé, Prefect of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, and to his collaborators who are concelebrating with me at this Holy Mass.

May the Lord renew in you and in all consecrated people each day the joyful response to his freely given and faithful love. Dear brothers and sisters, like lighted candles, always and everywhere shine with the love of Christ, Light of the world. May Mary Most Holy, the consecrated Woman, help you to live to the full your special vocation and mission in the Church for the world's salvation.

Amen!

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