



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

HOMILY OF JOHN PAUL II

Saturday, 2 February 2002

VI Day of Consecrated Life

1. *"They brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord...)"* (Lk 2,22).

Today, forty days after Christmas, the Church relives the mystery of the Presentation of Jesus in the temple. She relives it *with the astonishment of the Holy Family of Nazareth*, enlightened by the full revelation of that "child", who - as the first and second readings have reminded us - is the eschatological judge promised by the prophets (Mt 3,1-3), the "merciful and faithful high priest" who came to "expiate the sins of the people" (Heb 2,17). The Child, whom Mary and Joseph lovingly brought to the Temple, is the Word Incarnate, the Redeemer of man and of history!

Today, commemorating what took place on that day in Jerusalem, we are invited to enter the Temple, to meditate on the mystery of Christ, *the Only-Begotten Son of the Father* who, by means of his Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery, became the *Firstborn of redeemed humanity*. This feast prolongs the mystery of *Christ the Light*, who shines upon us in the Solemnities of Christmas and Epiphany.

2. *"Light of revelation for the nations and glory of your people Israel"* (Lk 2,32). The venerable old Simeon pronounced these prophetic words, inspired by God, as he takes the Child Jesus in his arms. At the same time, he foretells that "the Messiah of the Lord" will carry out his mission as a "sign of contradiction" (Lk 2,34). As for Mary his Mother, she will personally participate in the Passion of her divine Son (cf. Lk 2,35).

In today's feast, therefore, we celebrate the *mystery of consecration*: consecration of Christ,

consecration of Mary, consecration of all who follow Jesus for love of the Kingdom.

3. As I greet Cardinal Eduardo Martínez Somalo who is presiding at this celebration, I am pleased to be able to be with you, dear brothers and sisters who one day, recently or long ago, *made the total gift of yourselves to the Lord* in the vocation of the consecrated life. While I cordially greet each one of you, I am thinking of the great things that God has worked and is working in you, "drawing to himself" your entire life.

I praise the Lord with you, because he is so great and beautiful a Love as to deserve the priceless gift of the whole person in the unfathomable depths of the heart, and in the concrete unfolding of daily duty through the various stages of life.

Your "*Here I am!*", modelled on that of Christ and of the Blessed Virgin, is symbolized by the candles that this evening light up the Vatican Basilica. Today's feast is especially dedicated to you who among the People of God re-present in an outstanding way the eschatological newness of Christian life. You are called to be lights of truth and of justice, witnesses of solidarity and peace.

4. How can I can forget the Day of Prayer for Peace, *celebrated ten days ago in Assisi. For this extraordinary mobilization for peace in the world, I knew and I know, that I could count particularly on you, dear consecrated persons. On this occasion too, I express deep gratitude to you.*

Thank you, first of all, for your prayer. How many contemplative communities, entirely devoted to prayer, knocking night and day at the heart of the God of peace, cooperate in Christ's victory over hatred, revenge and the structures of sin!

Besides prayer, many of you, dear brothers and sisters, build peace with the *witness of brotherhood and communion*, spreading the Gospel spirit in the world like yeast that makes humanity grow towards the Kingdom of Heaven. Thank you for this!

On many frontiers men and women religious are offering their *effective dedication to justice*, working among those on the fringes of society, dealing with the root causes of conflicts to help build a substantial, lasting peace. Wherever the Church is at work in defending and promoting human persons and the common good, you are there, dear consecrated men and women, who to belong entirely to God belong entirely to your brothers and sisters. Every person of goodwill is grateful to you for this.

5. The icon of Mary that we contemplate as she offers Jesus in the temple prefigures that of the Crucifixion and also anticipates its true interpretation of Jesus, Son of God, sign of contradiction. Indeed, on Calvary, the *sacrifice of the Son, and with it, that of his Mother*, reach fulfillment. The same sword pierces both, the Mother and the Son (cf. Lk 2,35). The same sorrow, the same love.

On this road, the *Mother of Jesus* became the *Mother of the Church*. Her pilgrimage of faith and consecration is the archetype for that of every baptized person. This is particularly true for those who embrace the consecrated life.

How comforting it is to know that Mary is beside us, as Mother and Teacher, on our path of consecration! Not just on a simply emotional level, she is profoundly close to us at the level of supernatural efficacy, attested by the Scriptures, by Tradition and by the testimony of the saints, many of whom followed Christ on the demanding path of the evangelical counsels.

Mary, Mother of Christ and our Mother, we thank you for the tender care with which you guide us on the ways of life, and we ask you: present us today anew to God, our only Good, so that our lives, consumed by love, may be a sacrifice that is living, holy, and pleasing to him. Amen!

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