

W THE WEDNESDAY WORD

The Parish Version

Encountering Christ
Prayerfully preparing for the
Sunday Mass and praying in
particular for our school families



Preparing for the Mass of Sunday 2nd February 2014 - The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

1 Relax & Remember

Set aside 10 -15 minutes and create a suitable environment by removing any distractions. Make sure that you are comfortable. Perhaps light a candle. Make the sign of the cross † and remain still for a minute of settling silence. **Call to mind the love that God has for you. Remember that through this scripture our Lord is truly present.** Then read the Gospel, preferably aloud and slowly, and pay attention to any words that stand out. If any do, meditate on them for a few minutes and be invited into a dialogue with God.



2 Read

Taken from the Gospel for Sunday 2nd February 2014 The Child Destined for the Rise and Fall of many (Luke 2:22-40)

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord – observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord – and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said: 'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised; because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.' As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected – and a sword will pierce your own soul too – so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.' There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

3 Reflect

After spending a few minutes considering this Gospel, continue by reading Fr Henry Wansbrough's reflection.

The story of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple is dominated by Simeon's welcome, 'a light to enlighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel', and by his warning to Mary, 'a sword will pierce your heart'. Simeon reiterates the angel's promise that the child would fulfil the destiny of Israel and Israel's mission to the nations. Much like any family life, the promised future included the delights of the growing, developing child, and the background fear that the great destiny of each child may include sorrow and even heart-break. How much did Mary and Joseph know about the precious child they were nurturing? As he grew to independence did he become more loving and supportive? How did his contemporaries find him? Was he a leader? Did he stand out from the pack? Each of us has a private picture of the child, the boy, the adolescent, the young man. If he was fully human, he had the same frustrations and worries as every child growing in youth and through puberty. All we know for sure is that 'the child grew to maturity' and that Mary 'pondered all these things in her heart' - with Simeon's welcome and warning before her mind.

Imagine Jesus' first serious conversation as an enquiring child with Mary.

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB

4 Respond & Request

Now slowly and prayerfully read the Gospel once again but this time in silence. Consider how this Gospel could apply to your life in general. Then thank God for any insight you may have received. Conclude by asking God to bless you with one of the following spiritual gifts to help you act on any resolution you have made: love, understanding, wisdom, faithfulness, peace, self-control, patience, or joy. Please remember to pray for the Church and particularly our school families. **Then conclude by requesting the prayers of Our Lady & St Joseph.**



WEDNESDAY WORD PLUS †

Fr Henry's reflections on the first and second readings of Sunday 2nd February 2014



First Reading: *The Coming of the Lord*

Malachi 3:1-4

The Lord God says this: Look, I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me. And the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter his Temple; and the angel of the covenant whom you are longing for, yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. Who will be able to resist the day of his coming? Who will remain standing when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire and the fullers' alkali. He will take his seat as refiner and purifier; he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and then they will make the offering to the Lord as it should be made. The offering of Judah and Jerusalem will then be welcomed by the Lord as in former days, as in the years of old.

This first reading from Malachi is dire and threatening. The Lord will come to his Temple and refine it. The reading seems to fit better with the coming of Jesus to the Temple to cleanse it in the final days of his ministry than with the coming of the child Jesus in helpless innocence. Yet the searing, final coming is already presaged in the coming of the young Jesus to the Temple to be greeted by Simeon as the fulfilment of God's promise of salvation. Malachi prophesied the purging of the sons of Levi, and no one can deny that a dreadful purging of the sons of Levi took place at the sack of Jerusalem in the year 70AD; the people had failed to recognize their Lord. This cannot but give us pause to reflect whether we, who have theoretically committed ourselves to Christ, have in fact responded and been converted and purged. Are we in any way better than those who were condemned and suffered, or are we merely more secretive, better at concealing our faults and secret distortions from others? The thoughts of all hearts will be laid bare in the end. It might be as well to start laying our hearts bare (or purging them) now.

How is it that many people failed to recognize who Jesus was?

Second Reading: *The Faithful High Priest*

Hebrews 2:14-18

Since all the children share the same blood and flesh, Jesus too shared equally in it, so that by his death he could take away all the power of the devil, who had power over death, and set free all those who had been held in slavery all their lives by the fear of death. For it was not the angels that he took to himself; he took to himself descent from Abraham. It was essential that he should in this way become completely like his brothers so that he could be a compassionate and trustworthy high priest of God's religion, able to atone for human sins. That is, because he has himself been through temptation he is able to help others who are tempted.

The inclusion of this reading is unbelievably moving: the child presented in the Temple is also to suffer, the sword will pierce Mary's heart. But it is because Jesus is fully human, and now a helpless child, that his loving obedience to the Father will save the human race. 'What was not assumed was not saved,' say the Fathers. In Jesus, the source of our salvation, the disobedience of Adam was washed away. Adam is the representative of us all, personifying the human race. Jesus had to be like his brothers and sisters, to share their full human nature if he was to save their human nature. He shared our baby helplessness, our adolescent anguish, our fear of death, our loss of friends whom we thought were faithful. In all this he knit himself into the human race and, by taking it upon himself, saved it by joining it once more into the Father's love. The language of high priesthood is used in this Letter to the Hebrews because the letter is written to Hebrews who were pining for the rituals of the Temple. But the priesthood of Christ is radically different, according to the order of Melchizedek (an unknown priesthood), and no longer that of Aaron.

What was the purpose of Jesus' death?

“ Jesus' loving obedience to the Father will save the human race. ”

The Wednesday Word: *Connecting Home, School & Parish through the Word of God*

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