

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD – YEAR A

Today we celebrate the feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. This ritual was part of the ancient heritage of the people of Israel. In the case of Jesus however, the ritual did proceed as those watching would have expected.

The people of Israel were acutely aware of their indebtedness to God for everything he had done for them, especially for rescuing them from their bondage in Egypt. In response to God's saving action, the book of Exodus commands that, "you shall set apart to the LORD all that first opens the womb (Ex13:12)." Every firstborn son and every firstborn male of the livestock was to be offered/presented to God, in thanksgiving.

The first born of the animals would be sacrificed in the temple, whereas each firstborn son would be consecrated to the Lord's service, becoming as it were the Lord's possession.

A profound example of this is related in the account of the Prophet Samuel's birth. Samuel's mother Hannah, who had been unable to have children until she was blessed by the Lord, consecrated Samuel to God in thanksgiving. While Hannah continued to have contact with her son, he grew up within the Temple, cared for by Eli the priest. Samuel grew serving the Lord, first as a priest and then as the prophet who was to consecrate King David.

Within the Mosaic law however allowance was made for parents to redeem/reclaim their son. To do so they would make a substitute offering as specified in the law of Moses (Ex. 13:13). Undoubtedly this would have been the choice that most parents would have made. Mary and Joseph however made no such substitution offering. Like Samuel before him, Jesus was wholly consecrated to the Lord's service.

Pope Benedict xvi (2012) teaches that, *"Instead of being reclaimed ... (Jesus) was given over completely to God and from now on belongs to him completely."*

From the first, Mary and Joseph understood that while God had entrusted Jesus to their care, he belonged to God. He was God's Only Begotten Son. In Presenting Jesus in the Temple therefore, Mary and Joseph were symbolically returning him to the Father from whom he had

Rev. Kevin Webb

come. Unlike Samuel however Jesus did not grow up within the Temple precinct. God had prepared the most perfect of temples for his Only Begotten, the temple of the Holy Family.

What was true of Jesus then, is true for every baptised person today. In baptism we are presented to God, in this his Temple. We become united to Christ and in Christ we are consecrated to God. Through our union with Christ we are elevated to the status of the children of the Most High God. We are daughters and sons of the Father and as such, our lives belong to him. Like Jesus before us, we too must commit ourselves unreservedly to his service.

St. Peter teaches that we, “... *are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...*”

The questions we must ask of ourselves today therefore are:

- Am I living up to my royal calling?
- Am I making of my life, a fragrant offering, pleasing to the Lord?