



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple

I have searched for you

Readings: Malachi 3: 1-4, Ps 23, Hebrews 2: 14-18, Luke 2: 22-40

One of the last images of the late Saint John-Paul II is of his great stooped figure hunched over the altar, in his hands the Bread of Life and his gaze fixed unerringly on the Presence of Our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament.

Beneath the ikon reads the legend of his last words, his dying prayer.

‘I have searched for you and you have come to me and I thank you.’

That picture came back to me as I was preparing for this feast of Candlemas.

In our time we have watched as this great spiritual giant of a Pope has daily gone in and out of the Temple and into the world to bring the light of Christ to the nations.

There in the Gospel this morning, in Jerusalem, two millennia ago, another old man is about the same prophetic task. Saint Simeon has been waiting, longing for the moment of the Lord’s return to the Temple and, in the babe in the arms of Mary, he now knows that He, the Lord, has come. In this knowledge and this promise he is ready to die. God’s promise to him has been fulfilled. ‘I searched for you and you have come to me and I thank you.’

Like Blessed John Paul II, holding the Bread of Life, so old Simeon takes Jesus in his arms and blesses God and looks forward to heaven. *'Lord now let your servant depart in peace according to your word. For my eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared before the face of all people – a light to enlighten the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel'*.

It is the Nunc Dimittis with which, at Compline, the Night Office of the Church, we commit ourselves to the little death of sleep and our eventual death with absolute confidence to the Father.

In John-Paul II as in Simeon, there is no fear of death but rather the certainty of the divine promise fulfilled and the long awaited welcome home. In old Simeon's song of joy we begin to learn something of the nature of the God who comes to us in Christ.

God comes humbly, as a tiny child, to the Temple where men seek Him. He comes, not as a temporary political solution to the current problems of His people Israel, but as a permanent salvation for all who turn to Him.

He comes to bring in a kingdom which, in earthly terms never gets off the ground and ends on a gallows. But it is kingdom whose power reaches down the millennia and into eternity and rules in the hearts of men and will determine their eternal destiny.

He comes, in our mortality, to defeat the ancient enemy of Man, death itself, and raise in triumph those who have received His divine life into themselves, who have enshrined His Gospel Word in their hearts and received the Chalice of His Blood shed for their sins.

Here at Candlemas the Christmas season ends. The joyous song of the angels has returned to the heavens. The shepherd witnesses are back with their sheep. As Joseph and Our Lady approach the Temple, with the offering of the poor in their hands and Jesus in their arms, the powers of darkness are already beginning to gird themselves.

The soldiers of Herod will shortly be about their bloody business. The Holy Family will flee before the terror into the exile of Egypt. The long pursuit of Jesus will only end at Calvary and there, as Simeon foresees, a sword will pierce the very soul of Mary for grief. Down all the ages that sword will continue to grieve her heart as men reject her Beloved Son, reject her motherhood given at the Cross and despise the motherhood of Christ's Holy Church.

It is against this darkness that the little brothers and sisters of Jesus set out, down all the ages, bearing that same Light, the light of the Gospel, the Lux Mundi, the Light of the World, Jesus Himself.

It is that light that, as St. John reminds us in his Prologue, the darkness cannot comprehend or overcome. It is the light that can never be put out.

Anne Frank, the Jewish child martyr, wrote in her diary, 'A single candle both defines and defies the darkness.'

And so it does. When we hold these little wax reminders of the light of Christ, we are rededicating ourselves to bear that Light into the dark places of our own hearts and the dark places of our world, the prisons of sin and despair, the empty pits of life without meaning and filled with self loathing,

the wasteland of materialism where Man no longer knows himself loved by God or made for an eternal destiny.

Wherever we go our lives are to be, like the prophetess Anna, little sanctuary lamps proclaiming the Presence of Jesus, drawing people to Him.

With Saint John-Paul II and Saint Simeon we need not fear our dying but rather look forward to it as the gateway to being with Jesus forever.

As we receive Christ at the Temple here today, we take Him from the arms of Mother Church into our own hands, into our own hearts and, fearless now of death, we carry Him into His world, wherever He may lead, 'the Light for the nations and the glory of His people Israel', the Light that can never be put out.

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