

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, 40 days after Jesus' birth. Mary and Joseph came to the Temple of Jerusalem to offer the fitting sacrifice for a poorer couple (two turtle-doves or young pigeons) when an old prophet named Simeon spoke two prophecies under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The first was gratitude at having seen the Messiah: "***My eyes have seen your salvation which you have prepared in the sight of all the peoples.***" Simeon and Anna waited so long to see the Savior and were so grateful for the sight.

Then Simeon said these mysterious words to the Blessed Mother: "***Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted—and you yourself a sword will pierce—so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.***" The coming of God in the flesh in Jesus Christ requires a choice, the rise or fall of all people is based upon it. We don't always like having to make decisions but as the band Rush famously said, "*If you choose not to decide, you still have made a choice.*"

C.S. Lewis pointed out that the one thing we can't say about Jesus was that He was just a nice, wise man inspired by God. He is either who He said He was, the Son of God, or he was a crazy man or a liar. Jesus is either a lunatic, a liar or the Lord, but not simply a kind and wise human being, not even a prophet. Simeon also said that Jesus is a sign that will be contradicted.

The humble and poor remnant of Israel, like Anna and Simeon, rejoiced at the Lord's coming. As Archbishop Fulton Sheen said, the Gospel comforts the afflicted but afflicts the comfortable. The poor, the sick, those oppressed by the devil, those lamenting the moral evils around them, those trying to be faithful are all encouraged by Jesus Christ. We are meant to be in their number, however, the proud and worldly wise like the Pharisees, and hardened sinners are challenged by the Lord.

Jesus calls all people to believe in Him and to follow Him, which gives us peace and joy when we do. He challenges our sinful rebellion and disturbs our complacency. Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation "The Gospel of Joy," writes about what should disturb us today. He says, "*If something should rightly disturb us and trouble our consciences, it is the fact that so many of our brothers and sisters are living without the strength, light and consolation born of friendship with Jesus Christ*" (#49).

The presence, holiness, and innocence of the Lord confront us with a choice. We will either conform our lives to His, however slowly, painfully, and with fits and starts but still with real conviction. Or we will stand against and defy the Holy One of God like those who mocked, crucified, and disbelieved in Jesus. There are only two directions in spiritual life, there is no neutral ground.

Next week we have our First Reconciliation with parents and other family members invited as well. The children might be a little uneasy even with their cotton-ball-like sins, but parents and others might be loaded down with what feel like bowling ball like sins, having been away from the sacrament for a while. The children usually want to go to the pastor to confess but parents might want to go to any other priest.

Jesus doesn't want to cause tension, anxiety or fear in any of our hearts. That will end as we trust and surrender to Him more and more. The more we are intentional disciples of Christ, the less He will be a sign of contradiction to us.

God bless,

Fr. Mike

