

January 3: Most Holy Name of Jesus

Gospel for January 3rd, feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus, and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 2:21-24*)

And at the end of eight days, when he was circumcised, he was called Jesus, the name given by the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, “Every male that opens the

womb shall be called holy to the Lord”) and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, “a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.”

Commentary

Today we celebrate the feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. The celebration of this feast dates back to the 14th century, when Saint Bernardine of Siena, a Franciscan missionary, began to spread devotion to the Name of Jesus. He did so by displaying a placard showing the Eucharist surrounded by rays of light and with the monogram *IHS* which means *Iesus Hominum Salvator*, that is, “Jesus Savior of mankind.”

Today’s Gospel tells us that, according to the law of Moses (cf. *Ex* 13:11-16), eight days after the birth of

the first-born son, the parents had to go to the Temple to circumcise him. And forty days after the birth, they returned to the Temple to present the child and for the purification of the mother.

It is surprising to see how Jesus, our Redeemer, is the one who seems to be redeemed in this Gospel. And how Mary, who is all pure, is presented in the Temple to be purified. This Gospel shows us the humility of God and the Blessed Virgin.

This is one of the teachings that we can draw from the Gospel. Jesus and Mary fulfill what God wants. But they do not need it, and yet they do so joyfully. How often you and I find it difficult to fulfill God's will in our own lives. We may rebel against the difficulties in daily life, against the unforeseen events that crop up each day. Often we say no to God. And we put our own will before God's. Jesus

and Mary teach us what true humility is: fulfilling God's will with joy. Saint Josemaría said: "Prayer is the humility of the one who acknowledges his profound wretchedness and the greatness of God. He addresses and adores God as one who expects everything from Him and nothing from himself" (*Furrow*, 259) This is what the Holy Family teaches us. It is worthwhile fulfilling God's will, because that is the path to our own happiness.

The Gospel also shows us the great value that sacrifices have in God's eyes. The Jewish historian Josephus describe how, on the Passover of 70 AD alone, the Temple priests offered 256,500 lambs on the altar. The sacrifices and offerings in the Old Testament were not meant to save, but to teach (cf. *Gal* 3:24). By offering these sacrifices to God, the people of Israel learned to offer themselves freely to God and to delight in his

Will. This is the true meaning of sacrifice: making ourselves available for God's plans. Christians have the immense joy that in the Holy Mass we can share in Christ's sacrifice, which indeed is salvific.

The word "sacrifice" comes from the Latin "sacrum facere," that is, "to make something sacred," or also to honor and offer something. Joseph and Mary offered a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. They offered a sacrifice to God, to honor Him and give themselves to Him, knowing that our salvation comes from Him. As Pope Francis said, "Salvation is in Jesus' name. We must bear witness to this: He is the only Savior."

Jesus is our Savior. This is what we celebrate on this feast of the Most Holy Name of Jesus. This implies that we know we are lovingly looked upon by God at all moments. But it is

a mutual look. When we look at the Child in the stable of Bethlehem, at that very moment God is lovingly looking at us. Let us ask Mary to teach us how to honor the Name of Jesus in every moment of our day.

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