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Meditations: The Presentation of the Lord

Some reflections that can enrich our prayer on the feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

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- The feast of meeting
 - Simeon was a man filled with hope
 - Inspired by the Holy Spirit
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FORTY DAYS after the birth of Jesus, the Holy Family travels to the Temple in Jerusalem to fulfil what was prescribed by the Law: the presentation of the firstborn son (cf. *Ex. 13, 2.12-13*) and the purification of the mother (cf. *Lk 12: 2-8*). Both these mysteries, that of the Son of God and of the Immaculate Virgin Mary, are united in today's feast.

On the one hand, the presentation of the first son was a reminder of how the firstborn sons of the Hebrews had been saved in Egypt. According to the law of Moses, the firstborn son belonged to God and had to be *consecrated to the Lord* (*Lk 2:23*), so the ceremony was considered as a kind of "redemption." On the other hand, the mother's purification took place forty days after childbirth. Until then, the woman could not enter the holy places because it was thought that giving birth had made her impure. In the ceremony of

purification, a double sacrifice was offered: a lamb and a dove or pigeon. But if the woman was very poor, she could offer two turtle doves or two pigeons. “This time it will be you, my friend, who carries the cage with the doves. Just think: she – Mary Immaculate! – submits to the Law as if she were defiled.”^[1] The evangelist specifies that Mary and Joseph made the offering of the poor (cf. *Lk* 2: 24).

The Lord *will suddenly come to his temple* (*Ml* 3:1), says the prophet Malachi. This moment is both unique and sweet: the Son of God enters his own Temple. This is why Psalm 24 sings: *Lift up your heads, O gates!... that the King of Glory may come in. Who is the King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty*” (*Ps.* 24:7-10). However, this “strong God” does want to enter the Temple to the sound of trumpet blast but rather as another child, with the constant traffic of pilgrims, holy men, priests

and Levites: nobody was aware of what was taking place in their midst. Only two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, held the “King of Glory” in their arms. For this reason, the feast of the Presentation “is the feast day of encounter: the newness of the Child encounters the tradition of the temple; the promise finds fulfilment; young Mary and Joseph encounter the elderly Simeon and Anna. Everything, therefore, meets as Jesus arrives.”^[2]

SIMEON WAS *righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ (Lk 2:25-26).* Simeon was ready for the meeting with God because, like the sensible virgins of the

parable, he had his lamp filled with oil. He is an old man who enjoys the perennial youthfulness granted by hope. Moved by the Holy Spirit, he goes up to the Temple to pray. When he sees the recent arrivals from Bethlehem and studies the child's face, he realizes that this is not one more among the families who come every day to the Temple. In this child whom he takes in his arms is fulfilled all the prophecies: he is the one hoped for, the firstborn of a new humanity, the consecrated one of the Father.

“Simeon did not grow weary with the passage of time. He was now an old man, yet the flame still burned brightly in his heart. In his long life, there had surely been times when he had been hurt, disappointed, yet he did not lose hope. He trusted in the promise, and did not let himself be consumed by regret for times past or by the sense of despondency that can

come as we approach the twilight of our lives. His hope and expectation found expression in the daily patience of a man who, despite everything, remained watchful, until at last 'his eyes saw the salvation' that had been promised (cf. *Lk* 2:30)."^[3] —

With the help of the Holy Spirit, Simeon addressed the child as the "light" of all the nations (cf. *Lk* 2:29-35). Today's liturgy begins with a candlelight procession signifying that Christ is the light that comes to the world to guide people who, without God, will surely fall. The word of God, says St Josemaría, is "light and hope to men's hearts."^[4] — This is probably the secret of Simeon's youthful spirit: he is truly open to what God is saying to him, as if hearing it for the first time.

AFTER SIMEON, the family from Bethlehem meets Anna, a prophetess of advanced years who goes to the Temple “worshipping and fasting with prayer night and day” (*Lk 2:37*). This elderly widow, when she saw the baby, praised God and spoke of the child to *all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem* (*Lk 2:38*). Each of them prophesy that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah, and they suspect that his death and resurrection will save all nations.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in this scene is palpable. “It is the Spirit who motivates the steps and moves the hearts of those who await him. It is the Spirit who prompted the prophetic words of Simeon and Anna, words of blessing and praise of God, of faith in his Anointed One, of thanksgiving, for at last our eyes could see and our arms embrace ‘your salvation’ (cf. *Lk 2:30*).”^[5]
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Simeon and Anna are two people

who are docile to divine inspiration. The Holy Spirit was the motor of their lives, “he was in them,” guided them, encouraged them and spoke in their hearts. They are an icon of sanctity because they heard and announced the Word of God, as they searched with determination for the face of Christ.

“In the temple Jesus comes to meet us and we go to meet him. We contemplate the encounter with the elderly Simeon, who represents Israel’s faithful anticipation and the heartfelt jubilation for the fulfilment of the ancient promises. We also admire the encounter with the elderly prophetess Anna who, in seeing the Child, exults in joy and praises God. Simeon and Anna are the anticipation and the prophecy, Jesus is the novelty and the fulfilment: he is presented to us as the perennial surprise of God; concentrated in this Child born for

all is the past, made of memory and of promise, and the future, full of hope.”^[6] We can imagine how Simeon and Anna must have looked admiringly upon Mary, who had carried this hope in her womb. She can intercede for us so that we never lack the encouragement of the Holy Spirit who makes all things new.

^[1] St Josemaría, *Holy Rosary*, Fourth Joyful Mystery: The Presentation in the Temple.

^[2] Pope Francis, Homily, February 2, 2019.

^[3] Pope Francis, Homily, February 2, 2021.

^[4] St Josemaría, *The Way of the Cross*, First Station.

^[5] Benedict XVI, Homily, February 2, 2016.

^[6] Pope Francis, Homily, February 2, 2016.

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