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Commentary on the Gospel: The Holy Family (Year B)

Gospel for the 1st Sunday of Christmas, Solemnity of the Holy Family (Cycle B), and commentary.

Gospel (*Lk 2:22-40*)

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.”

Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man 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. And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

“Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word;

for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and for glory to thy people Israel.”

And his father and his mother
marveled at what was said about
him; and Simeon blessed them and
said to Mary his mother,

“Behold, this child is set for the fall
and rising of many in Israel,

and for a sign that is spoken against

(and a sword will pierce through
your own soul also),

that thoughts out of many hearts
may be revealed.”

And there was a prophetess, Anna,
the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe
of Asher; she was of a great age,
having lived with her husband seven
years from her virginity, and as a
widow till she was eighty-four. She
did not depart from the temple,
worshiping with fasting and prayer

night and day. And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him.

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Commentary

This Gospel passage for the solemnity of the Holy Family contains several scenes from Jesus' childhood recounted by Saint Luke. We can vividly sense in them the loving memories of our Lady. Mary and Joseph bring their newborn Child to the Temple to pay Jesus' ransom as

first-born son and offer the ritual sacrifice of purification for his mother. Since the Holy Family is truly poor, all they can offer are two turtle doves.

The scene takes place in the Temple of Jerusalem, where the Holy Family, as Luke mentions in the next verse (cf. *Lk 2:41*), went every year to fulfil the Jewish law. At least two of those trips to Jerusalem and the Temple must have been etched with special clarity in the Holy Family's memory: the scene of the Presentation that we see here, and when Mary and Joseph lose their 12-year-old Child during the Passover feast.

In today's narrative, we see the prophetess Anna, who on witnessing the scene praised God and spoke of Him to the pious people waiting for the redemption. It also highlights Simeon's joyful song and his prophesy that the Child would be a

“sign of contradiction” for the world, and that our Lady’s pure soul would be pierced by a sword.

The day of Jesus’ presentation in the Temple was marked by both great joy and suffering. The shadow of the future Cross was projected in advance on the hearts of Mary and Joseph, while the paschal light of salvation was also glimpsed, sung and spread by women and men of God.

In this scene, we see the Holy Family as a model of virtue and ordinary family life. Luke stresses three times that they did everything “according to the law of the Lord.” This expression emphasizes the pious docility of the Holy Family to the Mosaic precepts. The Holy Family had also gone to Bethlehem to fulfil a Roman decree, thus showing their docility to the civil authority. They give us a lesson here of humility and

obedience to fulfill on our part what is established by the legitimate authorities, both religious and civil.

Luke also gives us a brief summary of the parents' joy and amazement on watching their Child grow and mature quickly. Everything in the life of the Holy Family takes place with simplicity and naturalness. Their faithful fulfilment of God's law when they go to the Temple would also be reflected in all their ordinary life, in their relationships with others, in their way of working and resting and even in their external bearing.

“The fact that Jesus grew up and lived just like us shows us that human existence and all our ordinary activities have a divine meaning. No matter how much we may have reflected on all this, we should always be surprised when we think of the thirty years of obscurity which made up the greater part of

Jesus' life among us. He lived in obscurity, but, for us, that period is full of light. It illuminates our days and fills them with meaning, for we are ordinary Christians who lead an ordinary life, just like millions of other people all over the world.”[1]

[1] Saint Josemaria, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 14.

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