

Holy Family (B)

Gospel text (Lk 2,22-40): When the day came for the purification according to the law of Moses, they brought the baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God. And they offered a sacrifice as ordered in the law of the Lord: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

There lived in Jerusalem at this time a very upright and devout man named Simeon; the Holy Spirit was in him. He looked forward to the time when the Lord would comfort Israel, and he had been assured by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord. So he was led into the Temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law. Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God, saying, «Now, O Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, for you have fulfilled your word and my eyes have seen your salvation, which you display for all the people to see. Here is the light you will reveal to the nations and the glory of your people Israel». His father and mother wondered at what was said about the child. Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, «See him; he will be for the rise or fall of the multitudes of Israel. He shall stand as a sign of contradiction, while a sword will pierce your own soul. Then the secret thoughts of many may be brought to light».

There was also a prophetess named Anna, daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. After leaving her father's home, she had been seven years with her husband, and since then she had been continually about the Temple, serving God as a widow night and

day in fasting and prayer. She was now eighty-four. Coming up at that time, she gave praise to God and spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem. When the parents had fulfilled all that was required by the law of the Lord, they returned to their town, Nazareth in Galilee. There the child grew in stature and strength and was filled with wisdom: the grace of God was upon him.

«They brought the baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord»

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Today, we celebrate the feast of the Holy Family. Our gaze instinctively goes to the middle of the manger —Jesus— to look at Mary and Joseph. The eternal Son of the Father goes from the eternal Family, which is the Holy Trinity, forward to the worldly family formed by Mary and Joseph. How important must the family be in the eyes of God, when the first thing God provides His Son with, is a family!

In his apostolic letter *The Rosary of the Virgin Mary*, John Paul II has again emphasized that the family is of paramount importance as the foundation of the Church and of the human society, and he asks us to pray for the family while encouraging the daily recitation of the Holy Rosary within the family to revivify this institution. If the family goes well, the society and the Church will go well too.

The Gospel tells us that the child grew in stature and strength and that he was filled with wisdom. Jesus found the warmth of a family built up in their reciprocal love relationship. It would be so beautiful and profitable our trying as hard as possible to build up our own family: with spirit of service and prayer; with mutual loving; with a greater capacity to understand and forgive. We would have a taste of Heaven —as in the Nazareth home— down here! Today, one of the most urgent tasks we have is to build up our family. As the Second Vatican Council reminded us, the parents ought to have an irreplaceable role: «It is the duty of parents to create a family ambiance animated by love and piety towards God and towards men, that favors the total personal and social education of the sons». In the family we learn what is most important, i.e. to be persons.

Finally, to speak with Christians about the family is to speak of the Church.

Evangelist Luke tells us that Jesus' parents brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord. That offering was the representation of Jesus' sacrificial offering to his Father, from the fruit of which Christians are born. To consider this joyous reality will open us to a greater fraternity and to loving more the Church.