

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord of Jesus

Today's Gospel presents the head of the Holy Family, Joseph, faithfully obeying God's law given through Moses concerning the purification of the mother and the redeeming of the child, by presenting Mary and the Baby Jesus in the Temple. The events recounted appear elsewhere in the liturgical year but are those we traditionally celebrate today, February 2nd, with the *Feast of Presentation of Jesus*.

This is a combined feast, commemorating the Jewish practice of the purification of the mother after childbirth and the presentation of the child in the Temple. It is known as the *Hypanthe feast or Feast of the Purification of Mary* (by the offering two pigeons in the Temple), the *Feast of the Presentation of the Lord* (by prayers and the payment of "five shekels to a member of the priestly family" (Nm 3:47-48; Lk 2:22), to redeem or buy the firstborn male child back from the Lord's service), and the Feast of Encounter (because the New Testament, represented by the Baby Jesus, encountered the Old Testament, represented by Simeon and Anna). On February 2nd, we celebrate these events as a formal ending of the Christmas season. The same day, we also celebrate *the Feast of Candlemas* (because candles are blessed then for liturgical and personal use).

Purification and redemption ceremonies: The Mosaic Law taught that, since every Jewish male child belonged to Yahweh, the parents had to "buy back" the child ("redeem" him), (The "Pidyon haBen" Service) with the payment of "five shekels (=15 Denarius= wage for 15 days of work) to a member of the priestly

family” (Nm 3:47-48; NAB Note on Lk 2:22). In addition, (Nm 18:15) every mother had to be purified after childbirth by prayers and the sacrifice *of a lamb* (or two turtledoves for the poor) in the Temple. Joseph kept these laws as an act of obedience to God.

The encounter with Simeon and Anna: By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the old, pious, Spirit-filled Simeon and the very old widow, Anna, both of whom who had been waiting for the revelation of God’s salvation, were present in the Temple the day Joseph and Mary brought Jesus to Present Him to the Father. Simeon recognized Jesus as the Lord’s Anointed One, and in his prayer of blessing, he prophesied that Jesus was meant to be the glory of Israel and a Light of revelation to the Gentiles.

While he blessed Mary, Simeon warned that her child would be “*set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign of contradiction*” and that “*a sword will pierce through your own soul*”. Simeon was prophesying both the universal salvation that would be proclaimed by Jesus and the necessity of suffering in the mission of the Messiah.

Every Holy Mass in which we participate is our presentation. Although we were officially presented to God on the day of our Baptism, we present ourselves and our dear ones on the altar before God our Father through our Savior Jesus Christ at every Holy Mass. Hence, we need to live our daily lives with the awareness both that we are dedicated people consecrated to God and that we are obliged to lead holy lives. Let us also remember and pray for our godparents who presented us to the Lord on the day of our Baptism.