

Purification of Mary & Presentation of Our Lord 2/2/20
Luke 2:22-32

SERMON TEXT IS A POINTED GOSPEL FOR THIS SUNDAY, FROM THE 2ND CHAPTER OF LUKE'S GOSPEL

“Now I’ve seen everything!” You know those words. When something outrageous happens, when something unbelievable happens, that’s the saying -- “Now I’ve seen everything!”

Like for example, some of you may well remember those grainy black and white images of Neil Armstrong setting foot on the moon.

Once, a man from the east – and I suppose I should clarify that this was a lot further east of North Dakota than Minnesota -- told me of visiting our grand state for the first time and it happened to be ... calving season. His soon-to-be bride’s uncle took him out to the barn where, I’m not sure if I should say he helped and observed the birth of the calf – but it most definitely was an “Now I’ve seen everything” moment!

Simeon had a “Now I’ve seen everything” moment that day. It was forty days after Christmas, after Jesus’ birth. Joseph and Mary had brought Jesus to the Temple to fulfill the Law. Every firstborn son belonged to the Lord. And so the parents had to redeem, literally “buy back,” their firstborn with a sacrifice forty days after they were born (cf. Leviticus 12).

At the Temple was Simeon, an old man, waiting for the consolation of Israel, the Evangelist tells us. What does that mean? It means this. Israel had waited for centuries for the coming Messiah, promised all the way back in Genesis, and Isaiah, and throughout the Old Testament. They waited and waited and waited. But Simeon had had a dream that he would not die until He had seen the Lord’s Christ, the Lord’s Messiah.

But he was getting old. Would God keep His promise? Or must he continue to wait and wait and wait and wait?

You can relate to Simeon, can't you? We all suffer through those times of waiting. We all have moments and times when we wait and wait, and wonder if God is keeping His promises or not. And we grow impatient and we doubt. "Why is this happening to me, Lord," becomes you cry when you suffer.

And we suffer because of our sin. Now, you must understand me clearly: we do not – not – suffer specific punishment for a specific sin. What I mean is that we live in the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death, where things are all messed up and broken because of sin. "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth," is how St. Paul says it (Ro 8:22). And death itself is the ultimate result of sin. "The wages of sin is death," says St. Paul in Romans 6:23. That is the Law speaking to you, right now.

What's more, because we know this, because we recognize instinctively that death just isn't right, if we are honest with ourselves, we fear death. Why do we fear death? We fear death because the wages of sin is death, and so if I die, what's going to happen to me? Will I go to heaven or hell? Will God keep his promises or not?

God understood our fear, so in love He sent His Son into our own flesh and blood. Our Epistle in Hebrews puts it this way:

"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery (He 2:14-15)."

In other words, Jesus entered into the world as a human baby, with human flesh and blood to destroy death by taking all of your impatience, all your doubt that God is not faithful to keep His promises, all of your fear of earthly things and your fear of death itself, all of your sin upon Himself. And He delivered you from all of it by His innocent suffering and death on Calvary's cross. And He rose the 3rd day to bring life and immortality to light, for you, Dear Child of God.

When you are baptized into Christ, you are baptized into His death and resurrection. Because you are baptized, you do not need to fear death. Because you are baptized, you are now free from the slavery of sin, death and the power of the devil. Because you are baptized, you are now free -- free to love, to serve as Christ has served you, all because death has no more hold over you.

Look at the faith and life of Simeon. He takes the infant Jesus into His arms, blesses God and sings,

“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel (Lk 2:29–32).”

Simeon is ready to depart in peace because He has seen the salvation of the whole world in that little babe just 40 days old. In other words, Simeon says, “Now I've seen everything!”

But what about you? You aren't Simeon, sitting at the steps of the Temple so many thousands of years ago. You are not one of the twelve disciples, or John the Baptist, or Mary or Joseph. You don't see Jesus in the flesh, like all those who lived with Him in His earthly life. What comfort do you have? What is your consolation?

Your consolation is this. You are baptized. You are clothed with Christ. You have died with Christ in the waters of the font. And what that means is that You have been presented to God already, holy and pure, clean and perfect in every way. Oh I know. It sure doesn't **feel** that way! The world may not see you that way. You may not always see yourself that way. But, we walk by faith, not by what we see with our eyes, nor by what we feel with our feelings (cf. 2 Co 5:7). You may not feel holy, but you are! Why? Because God says so in His Son.

And so today you come to the Altar of God to partake of Jesus' own body and blood. You don't hold Jesus in your arms; you eat and drink His very body and blood. He is in you and you in Him. And God looks at you and sees nothing but holiness and perfection. He sees you clean and whole, without spot or blemish. As Isaiah said,

“Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool (Is 1:18).”

Rev. William Weedon, in his book *Celebrating the Saints*, says it this way,

Having received the body and blood of Him whom Simeon held all those centuries ago, we pray with him, “It's ok, Lord. I can just die now. Take me home! I've seen Your salvation. I've tasted Your life. My sins are forgiven. My death is destroyed. I have nothing to fear because You have given Yourself to me entirely. I can go home right now (Concordia Publishing House, 2016, 30).”

This is God's promise to you. Like Simeon, you are ready to depart and be with Christ, whether it is today or tomorrow, ten years or a hundred years from now, it doesn't matter. You are in Him and He in you. You can say and sing with Simeon and all the saints before and after: “Now I've seen everything!”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.