

The Presentation of the Lord  
(Malachi 3:1-4 / Luke 2:22-40)  
02.02.2015

The two figures of Simeon and Anna speak to us today. This old man and this woman well on in years have a message of life and hope for all of us which they are happy to share.

Simeon's words reflect the universality of God's plan of salvation. In Simeon we have a member of God's chosen People declare that the Messiah of Israel has come into the world to bring deliverance to all the nations. This declaration was an enormous step forward. It was surely quite rare - extraordinary really - to hear a Jew speak like this in Simeon's day. Of course, the promise of universal salvation was there already in what God said to Abraham, but, by and large, the message had become lost.

Simeon's declaration makes me think of what Pope Francis keeps encouraging us to do as God's People today: to remember our mission to all, to reach out to people beyond our own enclaves, our own little fold, as it were. He continually calls upon us to see our life as mission, to recognise the blessings we have received as something relevant for others and not to be held on to in a jealous manner. All our blessings are a gift to be shared over and beyond our own particular circle of life.

Simeon's declaration makes it clear that in his mind, the One whom He recognised to have been sent by God, the long awaited Messiah of Israel, had for mission to reach out beyond the Hebrew nation to all the peoples of the earth. He hailed the Christ-child as *The glory of God's People Israel and a light for the Gentiles*.

Clearly, Simeon saw Christ as God's gift to all.

Concern for universal salvation should be ours as much as that of Simeon. Concern for universal salvation should preoccupy the Church of Jesus Christ today.

In his homily for the Day of Consecrated Life yesterday evening Bishop John made an interesting point when he quoted from the Second Vatican Council document *Lumen Gentium*. He drew attention to the Council's teaching that Religious Life should be a sign for all: believers and unbelievers alike.

I quote the text he referred to: *Let Religious see well to it that the Church truly show forth Christ through them with ever-increasing clarity to believers and unbelievers alike*.

A line further on in paragraph 46 of *Lumen Gentium* (a line which the bishop did not quote) reads: *Religious themselves should not think that their way of life alienates them from other men and women in the world around them*.

I would say: To the contrary! Our life as a life of communion should be seen to unite us to all people.

It is doubtless with these thoughts of the Council in mind that Pope Francis wrote recently in his *Letter To All Consecrated Men and Women* saying: *I am counting on you to wake up the world, since the distinctive sign of consecrated life is prophecy*.

Speaking to Religious Superiors last November, the Holy Father said that a priority that is needed right now is: *to be prophets who witness to how Jesus lived on this earth*. He went on to say: *A Religious must never abandon prophecy*.

To be a prophet does not necessarily mean broadcasting challenging messages to the crowds with a loud, thundering voice.

There are other ways of being a prophet than that.

The prophet Simeon and the prophetess Anna spoke gently and simply to the young couple Mary and Joseph and to those who were passing by at that moment in the Temple.

Pope Francis has insisted that fundamentally, the strength of the Church is men and women living by the Gospel and bearing witness to their faith by lives that are attractive because joyful. Again and again he emphasises the importance of joy. Just think of the title he gave to his first Encyclical: *Gaudium Evangelii, The Joy of the Gospel*.

Pope Francis stresses that what we are called to be is *leaven of the Kingdom of God by being close to others*, reaching out to them and welcoming them in. He says that what really matters are brotherly/sisterly love, solidarity and a willingness to share with others.

On this day which is marked by the whole notion of offering (the offering of the first-born, Christ's presentation in the Temple, the offering back of the blessed Christ-child to Mary and Joseph and through them to the whole world) we are led to see that the very essence of what the Gospel reveals about God is giving love: self-giving love.

What we contemplate in Jesus is what we are called to live in our turn: giving, self-giving love.

We have seen how Simeon's words would have us think of the call to reach out to the whole world.

Pope Francis reminds Consecrated Men and Women in this *Year of Consecrated Life* that he expects this movement and attitude of heart from us.

I quote from his *Letter to All Consecrated Men and Women*: *I expect from you what I have asked all the members of the Church: to come out of yourselves and go forth to the existential peripheries.*

He goes on: *A whole world awaits us: men and women who have lost all hope, families in difficulty, abandoned children, young people without a future, the elderly, sick and abandoned, those who are rich in the world's goods but impoverished within, men and women looking for a purpose in life, thirsting for the divine (...)*

He cries out to us: *Don't be closed in on yourselves!*

He calls upon monasteries such as ours to engage in *an exchange of experiences on the life of prayer, on ways of deepening communion with the entire Church, on welcoming those seeking a deeper spiritual life.*

God reached out to all people through His Christ.

He still reaches out to all people today, through His Church. At least, He wants to do so and He wants to do that through you and me.

Christ still brings light to others. He wants to do so through us.

We received the light of Christ as we entered into this celebration in much the same way as we do at the Easter Vigil.

The call addressed to us today is a call to become the light-bearers to all those we encounter.

It is to take Christ in our arms as Simeon did. It is to hold Him in our hearts and carry Him to others. It is to speak about Him as we are told Anna did. Our most eloquent testimony will always be our lives more than our words.

I leave the last word today to Pope Francis:

*The apostolic effectiveness of Consecrated Life does not depend on the efficiency of its methods. It depends on the eloquence of your lives, lives which radiate the joy and beauty of living the Gospel and following Christ to the full.*