



SUNDAY GOSPEL

Jesus, Heart of the Family

LUKE 2:22-40

When the day came for them to be purified as laid down by the Law of Moses, the parents of Jesus took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord - observing what stands written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord - and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is said in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to Israel's comforting and the Holy Spirit rested on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord. Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required, he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace, just as you promised;

because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see, a light to enlighten the pagans and the glory of your people Israel.'

As the child's father and mother stood there wondering at the things that were being said about him, Simeon blessed them and said to



Mary his mother, 'You see this child: he is destined for the fall and for the rising of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is rejected - and a sword will pierce your own soul too - so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

There was a prophetess also, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left

the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. She came by just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. Meanwhile the child grew to maturity, and he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

A WORD FROM POPE FRANCIS



On this first Sunday after Christmas, while we are still immersed in the joyous climate of celebration, the Church calls us to contemplate the Holy Family of Nazareth. The Gospel today presents Our Lady and St Joseph at the time when, 40 days after Jesus' birth, they go to the temple in Jerusalem. They do so in religious obedience to the Law of Moses, which requires that the first born son be presented to the Lord.

We can imagine this tiny family, in the midst of so many people, in the temple's grand courtyards. They do not stand out, they are not distinguishable....yet they do not pass unnoticed! Two elderly people, Simeon and Anna, moved by the Holy Spirit, approach and praise God for that child, in whom they recognize the Messiah, the light of the people and the salvation of Israel. It is a simple moment but rich with prophecy: the encounter between two young spouses full of joy and faith due to the grace of the Lord; and two elderly people also filled with joy and faith through the

action of the Spirit. Who causes them to meet? Jesus. Jesus makes them meet: young and old. Jesus is He who brings generations closer. He is the font of that love which unites families and people, conquering all diffidence, all isolation, all distance. This causes us to also think of grandparents: how important their presence is, the presence of grandparents! How precious their role is in the family and in society! A good relationship between the young and the elderly is crucial for the journey of the civil and ecclesial community. Looking at these two elderly people — Simeon and Anna — let us greet from here, with applause, all the worlds' grandparents.

The message that comes from the Holy Family is first of all a message of faith. In the family life of Mary and Joseph, God is truly at the centre, and He is so in the Person of Jesus. This is why the Family of Nazareth is holy. Why? Because it is centred on Jesus.

When parents and children together breathe in this climate of faith, they have an energy that allows them to face even difficult trials, as the experience of the Holy Family shows, for example, in the dramatic event of their flight to Egypt: a difficult ordeal.

The baby Jesus with his mother Mary and with St Joseph are a simple but so luminous icon of the family. The light it casts is the light of mercy and salvation for all the world, the light of truth for every person, for the human family and for individual families. This light which comes from the Holy Family encourages us to offer human warmth in those family situations in which, for various reasons, peace is lacking, harmony is lacking, and forgiveness is lacking. May our concrete solidarity not diminish especially with regard to the families who are experiencing more difficult situations due to illness, unemployment, discrimination, the need to emigrate.... Let us pray for all these families in difficulty, whether due to problems of illness, unemployment, discrimination, need to emigrate, due to difficulty in understanding each other and also to disunion.

Let us entrust to Mary, Queen and mother of the family, all the families of the world, that they may live in faith, in accord, in reciprocal aid, and for this I invoke upon them the maternal protection of the One who was the mother and daughter of her Son.

DISCUSS TOGETHER

1. This gospel and reflection by Pope Francis invite us to recognise the importance of many people in the life of families – children, parents, grandparents and even society itself. Who are the significant people who shaped your experience and understanding of family and nurtured your growth?
2. What role has Jesus played within the life of your family – how does your family reflect the Holy Family of Nazareth?

PRAY TOGETHER

Pray for Each Other

- Invite each member to share an intention for which they would like prayer
- As a group pray out loud for each person in turn

Response

Jesus, draw us together and unite us in your family.

Closing Prayer

Jesus, we thank you for the gift of our family. Encourage and guide us as we grow together in faith, supporting one another and those for whom family life is under stress or difficulty. Amen.