

Sin and Salvation

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Good morning. Grace, mercy, and peace to you this day from God our Father and our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today's Gospel tells how Joseph and Mary took Jesus to the temple according to the law. The rites and rituals of the temple – in fact, the temple itself – were really there for one reason. They were there as constant teaching tools. They were there to teach about our sin and God's salvation – the salvation that saves us from our sin.

And, today, our readings offer us two lessons, as Mary and Joseph come to the temple with Jesus. One lesson is about sin and the other is about salvation. Mary and Joseph, being devout, God-fearing people, are at the temple in obedience to the Law for the rite of purification according to Leviticus 12: 6-8, ***“And when the days of [a mother's] purifying are completed, whether for a son or for a daughter, she shall bring to the priest at the entrance of the tent of meeting a lamb a year-old for a burnt offering, and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering, ⁷ and he shall offer it before the LORD and make atonement for her. Then she shall be clean from the flow of her blood. This is the law for her who bears a child, either male or female. ⁸ And if she cannot afford a lamb, then she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons, one for a burnt***

offering and the other for a sin offering. And the priest shall make atonement for her, and she shall be clean.”

We heard that the required sacrifice was a year-old lamb or two turtledoves or pigeons. How ironic, that Mary and Joseph were bringing with them the very Lamb of God who would be the sacrifice not only for one person but for all the people of the world. In addition, they were there to make the presentation of their first-born, Jesus, according to Leviticus 12: 6-8, based on our Old Testament reading for today, ***“When in time to come your son asks you, ‘What does this mean?’ you shall say to him, ‘By a strong hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, from the house of slavery. For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the LORD killed all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of animals. Therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all the males that first open the womb, but all the firstborn of my sons I redeem.”***

So Joseph and Mary were to present Jesus to the Lord and Mary was to undergo the rite of purification. The presentation of Jesus on this day in the temple pointed to the Passover. During that first Passover, the firstborn of the Egyptians died, but God preserved those who painted the blood of the Passover lamb on the doorposts of their homes. So, the first Passover did double duty. It not only freed the Children of Israel from slavery in Egypt, but the blood of the lamb also pointed forward to the blood of the Savior who would save all people from their sins. The blood of the lamb painted on the wood of the door pointed

forward to the blood of Jesus shed on the wood of the cross.

So, as a reminder to them of the First Passover, God commanded His people to present each firstborn to Him and then, to redeem their firstborn with the blood of a lamb which pointed to the promise of the Savior to come. Now, that Savior had come. He was present in the temple – the baby Jesus – the Very Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world – was making the traditional connection between the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb in Egypt years before and His own future sacrifice on the cross. The sacrifice that Mary and Joseph were making for Mary's first-born son, pointed forward to the sacrifice that her son, Jesus, will make for them and all mankind on the cross.

It reminds us of the sacrifice that Abraham was sent to make of his son Isaac which was suddenly aborted with the presence of a ram as a substitute. Just as on that altar that Abraham had planned to use to sacrifice his son, Isaac, the temple was the place of sacrifice – lots of sacrifices. Each day there was the morning and the evening sacrifice. Given the population, there were probably several dozen firstborn sons being presented that day to God that day when Mary and Joseph came to present their firstborn son to God. And each sacrifice being made – pointed to Jesus.

Additionally, Mary was probably one of a couple of hundred or so mothers undergoing purification. With all these people making offerings and sacrifices, who would have time to notice a family of three poor Galileans among

so many people? Yet somebody did notice. The Holy Spirit led a man named Simeon to Jesus among all those other people in the temple that day. St. Luke purposely mentions the Holy Spirit three times as he introduces Simeon. He wrote: (1) the Holy Spirit was upon him; (2) the Holy Spirit revealed things to him; and (3) the Holy Spirit led him. The Holy Spirit made sure that Simeon was ready and waiting when the infant Lord came into His temple. The Holy Spirit moved Simeon to take Jesus into his arms. And in doing so, Simeon spoke words that tell us of the joy he felt as he hugged the infant redeemer to his chest.

These words that Simeon spoke in joy and thanksgiving when he held Jesus are so beautiful and meaningful that we sing them too after we encounter Our Lord in the Sacrament of the Altar when we take Jesus into ourselves in, with, and under the bread and wine. Simeon said, ***“Lord, now let 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 people; A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel.”*** Those powerful words of Simeon augment the angel’s message to Joseph, ***“...you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save His people from their sins.”***

We might be tempted to believe that ***“His people”*** are only the Jews. Simeon’s words make it clear that this salvation has been *prepared for all people*. It is a revelation **for the Gentiles** and a glory **for Israel**. When the angel said to Joseph, ***“His people”*** he meant all people in all places and in all times. These words are for us. We are those people

for whom Jesus came. Simeon held in his arms a baby who came for you and me as our salvation.

And the Holy Spirit was also at work in an old woman named Anna. Her lifestyle demonstrated the work of the Holy Spirit. She was a prophetess. Worship was the center of her life. Luke wrote, ***“She did not depart from the temple, worshiping with fasting and prayer night and day.”*** The Holy Spirit revealed the Lord to her as well. And notice how she responded to this revelation of her Savior. She joyfully shared the good news with others in the temple: ***“she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.”***

Now, this same Holy Spirit led you here today too, and the same Holy Spirit still works in us through the word of God. He works, first of all, to convict us of our sin of disobedience to the Law of God. We no longer offer up sacrifices to remind us of our sins. Instead, the Holy Spirit points us to the cross. At the cross, we are reminded of the sacrificial, bloody death of the Son of God. We are reminded that this Babe of Bethlehem is the Lamb of God. He is the REAL SACRIFICE who takes away the sin of the world.

The Holy Spirit reminds us that we should be the ones on that cross. We are the ones who should suffer for sin. Because, after all, it is our sin that causes the suffering. But our merciful God has given us a substitute like all those Old Testament sacrifices. All those innocent lambs and turtle doves who were sacrificed. God was showing that He has

going to send His innocent and guiltless Son in our form to be the sacrifice for our sins on the cross. Like all those animals before him - Jesus was there to take our place. The Prophet Isaiah wrote: ***“He was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed.”***

Instead of animals, instead of us being the ones who suffer and die, the Babe of Bethlehem is sent to do so. And in doing so, God bestows on us the great gift of eternal life. Eternal life that was demonstrated to us when Jesus Himself rose from death.

Do you see that after the Holy Spirit shows the punishment we earned with our sin, and then, He shows us our salvation? He shows us Jesus Christ. He gives us a Simeon and Anna vision. He shows us Jesus Christ dead on the cross and then risen from the dead. He shows us Jesus Christ who died for us but is now alive forevermore. This is the same Jesus Christ who kept the law when His parents presented Him in the temple. His earthly parents presented Jesus to His heavenly Father as a sacrifice for his earthly family. Jesus was presented as the sacrifice for you and for me.

And today, the Holy Spirit works in us just as it did in Simeon and Anna. Without the Holy Spirit's gift of faith, we only know Jesus as a cuddly baby in a manger. A baby who grew up to be a good moral teacher and then died a tragic death. But by faith, we know that the baby in the manger is God in the flesh who came to conquer sin, death, and the

devil with His suffering, death, and resurrection. Without faith, we cannot believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are alone at death and doomed to an eternity of pain and suffering. But, with faith, we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. We are assured that we have a Savior who remains with us through death and gives us eternal life. All this through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith by which we receive the gifts of God's salvation.

In today's Gospel, we heard about an event from Jesus' infancy. The Holy Spirit Himself inspired Luke to tell us of this event, from these words, Jesus was already teaching us about His work. Even before He could speak, Jesus was already teaching us ***"that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead."***

Today, we see Jesus enter His own temple to keep His own laws – the very laws He gave to Moses. In so doing, He is not only keeping the law on our behalf, but He is also taking part in an ancient object lesson. All those sacrifices offered on His behalf point to another event – the event for which this gift of God is sent to us – the event when He will take away all our sins and guarantee us eternal life. All those sacrifices pointed forward to the very way in which Jesus, the one who will save His people from their sins, will die as a sacrifice for us. Jesus, Himself, fulfills the promise of those sacrifices by offering Himself up as a sacrifice for us.

By the power of the Holy Spirit, we learn some lessons today. God shows us how Christ kept the smallest point of the law – even as an infant. And, through the presentation

ceremony in the temple, God foreshadowed the sacrifice He would send to the cross by pointing back to the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. Through the words of Simeon, we learn that this salvation is for all people, not just the Jews. Through Anna's actions, we learn how to share this Good News with others. Finally, in all these things, we see the Holy Spirit at work creating and sustaining the faith that makes us one with God.

And as if the gift of Jesus were not enough, we receive another gift. We receive the gift of faith that joins us to Christ. We shall never be separated from Him again. His triumphant sacrifice and resurrection make us part of His family. He will always be with us in this life and we shall be with Him in the next. The righteousness of this Infant, this Babe of Bethlehem, this One who was named Jesus, who will save His people is ours forever and ever.

Knowing these things, may the peace of God, which came to a man named Simeon and a woman named Anna, and which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in this true faith until life everlasting. Amen.