

PRESENTATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY

(J.F.M.H. – 7.11. 2019)

The feast that most readily comes to mind when the word "Presentation" is used, is the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. However, this is not the feast we keep on the 21 November. That feast deals with the presentation of His mother Mary in the Temple by her parents, St. Anne and St. Joachim. The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Temple is not recorded anywhere in the Gospels, although it is entirely logical to accept that it did happen. The event is mentioned in a number of apocryphal writings: the Proto-evangel of James, the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, and the Gospel of the Nativity of Mary are three examples. In the last named, it was stated that Joachim and Anna faithful to a vow they had made, presented the child Mary in the Temple when she was three years old; that the child herself mounted the Temple steps, and that she made her vow of virginity on this occasion.

Following the law it was a Jewish custom that the Hebrew firstborn male children were presented in the Temple. This induced pious Jewish parents to observe the same religious rite with regard to their other specially favoured children, some of whom were educated and lodged in the precincts of the Temple. There they were instructed in the Holy Scriptures, especially in the prophecies concerning the coming of the Messiah, and were taught to pray earnestly to God. Some of the children went on to attend the priests and Levites in the sacred ministry. The girls were also trained to perform household duties. It has been the tradition of the Church from an early period that Our Lady shared this privilege of being educated in the precincts of the Temple, and the institution of the Feast of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary seems to have settled the question in the minds of Catholics who followed the saying "The Law of Prayer is the Law of Faith". The great Doctors of the Church have insisted that she made a reference to her vow of virginity, when she said to The Angel Gabriel "I know not man".

The Temple, the House of her Heavenly Father, was a fitting place for the future Mother of God to be brought up. There she could learn to serve and love Him so well. By its detachment from the world, life in the Temple prepared her each day, more and more, to pronounce her perfect "Yes" to the Divine Will. It is interesting to see how the Presentation of Our Lady is reflected in The Prophecy of Simeon (Luke 2:25-35) ²⁵ "At that time there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon. He was righteous and devout and was eagerly waiting for the Messiah to come and rescue Israel. The Holy Spirit was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. That day the Spirit led him to the Temple. So when Mary and Joseph came to present the baby Jesus to the Lord as the law required, Simeon was there. He took the child in his arms and praised God, ²⁹ "Sovereign Lord, now let your servant die in peace, as you have promised. I have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared for all people. ³² He is a light to reveal God to the nations and he is the glory of your people Israel!" ³³ Jesus' parents were amazed at what was being said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, the baby's mother, "This child is destined to cause many in Israel to fall, and many others to rise. He has been sent as a sign from God, but many will oppose him. As a result, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul."

The feast itself seems to have been kept in the Eastern Church before it became popular in the West. The first known mention of the feast of the Presentation of Mary comes in a document from Constantinople dated 1166. The feast spread, and by 1371 was celebrated in the Papal court of Pope Gregory XI at Avignon. He was the last of the Avignon popes and brought the papacy back to Rome. One hundred years later at the beginning of his reign, Pope Sixtus IV O.S.F. introduced the office of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and in 1585 Pope Sixtus V OSF extended the feast of the presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the whole church. The church has never specified the age at which Mary was presented in the Temple, nor when she made her vow of virginity. The 21st November is not the day that the Church would have us believe that Mary was presented in the Temple. The Divine Office in an introduction to the feast tells us a little about the choice of the 21st November. "On this day, which was the dedication in the year 543 of the Church of Our Lady near to the Temple in Jerusalem, together with the Christians of the Eastern Rites we celebrate that dedication which Mary made to God from her very childhood under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit who filled her with grace at the Immaculate Conception.

When we honour the memory of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the feast day of her Presentation in the Temple, let's remember that she is the Patron of this Tabernacle of St. Francis, and that she has shown us, even as a child, her complete dedication to God. How well we would fill our vocation of victim souls of substitution if we followed her example. On the feast of the Presentation of the Virgin Mary, we celebrate the fact that Our Lady's parents brought her to the Temple at the age of three and handed her over to live there for a long period as a consecrated virgin where she might exclusively contemplate God. There is a special beauty to this feast since it highlights the fact that Our Lady was chosen even before time began. She is called the root of Jesse (Isaiah, 11:1) from which Our Lord Jesus Christ would be born.

Hail Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Remember, O most gracious Virgin Mary, that never was it known that anyone who fled to thy protection, implored thy help, or sought thy intercession was left unaided. Inspired with this confidence, I fly to thee, O Virgin of virgins, my Mother; to thee do I come; before thee I stand, sinful and sorrowful. O Mother of the Word Incarnate, despise not my petitions, but in thy mercy hear and answer me. Amen.