

Holy Family Sunday, 31 December 2023

Scriptures: Genesis 15:1-6; 21:1-3; Hebrews 11:8, 11-12, 17-19; Luke 2: 22-40

Homily: Fr. Ken

In the gospel, Luke provides a detailed account of Jesus' infancy. The perplexity and the promises, the concerns and the joys which the annunciation and the nativity of Jesus aroused, form the material of a narrative interwoven with reminiscences from the Old Testament.

Luke insists on the fact that Jesus' family belongs to the people, the religion and the hopes of the Jewish people. The text we have for today presents the episode known as the presentation of Jesus in the Temple. Luke speaks of "their purification" when in reality according to the law of Moses, it is something which affects only Mary as a woman. In fact, a mother has to offer a sacrifice in accordance with Leviticus; if she "cannot afford a sheep, she shall take two turtledoves or two pigeons". This is what Mary does. It is also what Vatican II calls "the offering of the poor". This is the situation of Jesus' family as the evangelist specifies.

In the temple, "a man whose name was Simeon" recognizes the Messiah in Jesus, the hope of Israel beginning to be fulfilled. Simeon is neither an eminent member of the people nor a priest of the temple. He utters a beautiful canticle, and then he can die in peace: "Master, now you are dismissing your servant in peace". But Simeon, a humble member of the Jewish people, also addresses Jesus' mother. This is the last prophecy announced in the Jerusalem temple itself about Jesus, and it also concerns Mary. Jesus will upset the current order; some will be raised, and others will fall. The testimony of the Messiah will sift through the inner thoughts of his people, and that will make him a sign of contradiction, the object of resistance and even of rejection.

A brief sentence indicates that the implications of this proclamation also involve Mary. The messianic perspective will pierce through her inmost being, her own soul. Mary belongs to Israel. Faith is a process, and it can be painful. The suffering in the life of the mother of the Lord will be another way of sharing the work of the Messiah.