

“My eye have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all people.”

OUR SALVATION

We celebrate today the presentation of the infant Jesus in the temple according to the requirements of the Jewish religion. It's a story of faith, joy, and the pain of suffering. Mary and Joseph were people of faith so it was a joyous occasion for them to travel to the temple in Jerusalem. For us this presentation of the Lord Jesus as an infant gives us a peek of God's plan of salvation for all of us. This also is an unforgettable occasion which the prophet, Malachi foresees: "And suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek. Yes he is coming say the Lord of hosts, but who will endure the day of his coming?"

Simeon who was a faithful person assured he would see his savior before he died says, "My eyes have seen your salvation ... a light for the revelation to the Gentiles and the glory for your people Israel." As we are told there are two people of great faith, Simeon and Anna who believed with all their being that they would see their savior god before the end of their days in this life. To wait in expectation like they did takes great faith, they believed the Holy Spirit's promise. Their faith was not frivolous though for in the midst of joy there also was be the promise of great pain and suffering for those connected to Jesus. From our reading for Hebrews we are told, "Because Jesus was tested through what he suffered he is able to help those who are being tested."

It is with joy that we get this glimpse into our savior, that our salvation comes at a great price - our savior must suffer and die to bring us redemption. We in our turn also experience pain and suffering as we make our way along the path of life that God has set for us. So let's talk about our faith in the midst of our suffering.

HN tells us that faith is the deep trust that God's love is stronger than all the anonymous power of the world and will transform us from being victims of darkness into servants of light. Such faith is not earned by us but is a free gift that God gives to men and women - all men and women. But as we well know our gift can grow dormant and thus we can lose it. So using this gift of faith will make it grow stronger within us. Faith must be exercised like Anna and Simeon did. Faith must increase for example by works of charity that are filled with hope and rooted in the faith of the Church. If we persevere then faith makes us taste in advance the gift of

the Beatific Vision where we see God face to face. That is how Simeon came to recognize that infant child as his Lord and Savior.

For us such faith is an enigma because our faith is often lived in darkness and under the power of death. This means that in our life we are always put to the test. The world that we live in often seems very far from the one promised by faith. Our experience of evil and suffering and death seem to contradict the Good News proclaimed by Jesus and his followers. So that shakes our faith and becomes the temptation to deny that God is good. People become agnostic or even atheist because that cannot accept that a good and powerful God would allow pain and suffering to happen. We ourselves will go through such feelings and thoughts. To combat that we must strengthen our faith. we do this by asking people to pray for us; ask Mary and all the saints to pray for us; ask the Holy Spirit to help us see the light in the darkness.

Pain and suffering is manifest to us in many ways. It can be our direct personal experience or it can be in our concern for worldwide peace. Our personal experience can be physical, spiritual and psychological. As we go through our personal experiences we seek relief. We search for happiness and we desperately want to keep pain and suffering away from us at all costs. That's because we make suffering the opposite of the gladness and happiness that we desire for our lives. We deny to ourselves and to others that we are hurting. We become stoic about our pain because we see it as a sign of weakness to ask for help. We can become withdrawn and isolated from the world. But we don't have to succumb to such a state. Jesus shows us a new way of being in the world. His is the way in which all pain can be embraced, not from a desire to suffer but in the knowledge that something new will be born from the experiences. He tells us the cross is both a symbol of death and life, of suffering and joy, of defeat and victory. It is the way of the cross that shows us the way to new life. Yet it will always remain very hard for us to embrace suffering, trusting that that will save us. We need a strong relationship with Jesus to do this. He tells us in Mt 11:28, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart and you will find rest for yourselves. For my yoke is easy and my burden light."

What about the suffering we see in the whole world? Is there anything we can do to help even though our resources are limited? Do we throw our hands up in de-

spair and harden our hearts. The answer comes from a spiritual way of cultivating a compassionate heart. Like Jesus shows us, we are called to take all that remote suffering into the very center of our being, into our heart where it becomes new material for my compassionate love. That's the way of Jesus who withholds nothing for the world. Shortly before his death and resurrection, Jesus said, "when I am lifted up from the earth, I shall draw all people to myself". Thus Jesus' act of compassion is to take upon himself the suffering of all people and make it into a gift of compassion to his Father. We participate in Jesus' way by seeking to convert our hard heart into a compassionate heart. That is our challenge; we don't dwell on our own suffering but we offer it up to Jesus confident that he takes our offering and makes it a gift to the Father. And what does our creator God do with this gift? He makes of it the material for a new life for all of us. He makes of it a new earth and a new heaven where we will dwell in eternal life. This is our ultimate act of faith!

I like the way Faye Sweeney puts it: "It is God who enables you to smile in spite of tears; to carry on when you feel like giving in; to pray when you are at a loss for words; to love even though your heart has been broken time and time again; to be understanding when nothing seems to make sense; to listen when you'd rather not hear; to share your feelings with others, because sharing is necessary to ease the load. Anything is possible because God makes it so."