

February 2, 2014 Presentation of the Lord Homily

Dear brothers and sisters, in the course of my long life, I have been in many public places, particularly restaurants. I should like to make one observation. In many of the Italian restaurants in which I have dined, I often find photographs of some well known celebrity in the company of the restaurant's owners and even members of their family. For example, in one Italian restaurant on the outskirts of Albany, there is a photograph of a popular actor, Ray Romano of "Everybody loves Raymond" fame on display. The question arises, why?

Let me suggest a few reasons.

- 1) Of all the fine restaurants in the Capital District, the actor chose only one and not any other. It is as if the actor gave the restaurant his stamp of approval. by his presence, he 'blessed' the place and brought joy to its owners;
- 2) Wishing to show their gratitude, the owners proudly exhibited the photographs for all the customers to see and appreciate; and
- 3) The photographs are mementos. Keeping the images on display quite likely means he shall never be forgotten. His memory will be kept alive.

Three responses: a blessing, a word of gratitude and a desire to keep the actor's memory alive. In our first reading, there is the remarkable prophecy of Malachi: "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple (3:1). Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the author of the third gospel, the evangelist, St. Luke, writes, that in the person of the Christ child, the prophecy has been fulfilled. On the feast of the Presentation of the Lord, we recall that the devout parents of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, brought their child to the temple to give praise and thanks to God for their first-born son. (Lk 2:22). And we treasure the words of the aged Simeon who recognized the enormity of the moment: "My eyes have seen your salvation, a light of revelation for the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel." (Lk 2:30-32).

We must keep in mind that for a Jew of our Lord's time, the temple in Jerusalem was considered to be a special dwelling of the Lord. In addition, the temple was recognized as the unique meeting place of God and human beings. The rabbis even regarded the temple as the "new Eden", a return to paradise. In the life of Jesus, the temple understandably is of the greatest importance. Only eight days after his birth, Jesus is brought to the temple for his circumcision. (Lk 2:21). Two of the Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary involve the temple (The presentation of the Lord and the finding of the child Jesus in the temple). Christ taught in the temple. And in one of the great turning points in the gospel narrative, Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple.

Just over five centuries before the birth of Our Lord, the prophet Malachi addressed the Jews of Jerusalem after they had rebuilt the temple. He scolded the priests and the people of the covenant for their infidelity and laxity. He assured them that one day the Lord would come to purify his temple and restore order to the most sacred of places. God blesses us by his presence. He inspires us to show gratitude for his gracious deeds.

His deeds demand that we keep his memory alive and heed his call to purify our lives. The great founder of western monasticism, St. Benedict, asked his followers to commit themselves to an ongoing reformation of their lives. He invited them to embrace the mystery of the Presentation, to undergo a continuous purification of their lives.

The words of the wise saint must speak to our hearts as well. Brothers and sisters, we owe God everything. How often do we thank him? How many of us dedicate our lives to his service? How many of us respond to his call to praise Him in the Eucharistic assembly? How many of us recognize the need to be purified in our secular and increasingly anti-Christian culture?

The Presentation of the Lord is a mystery as well as a challenge to all who identify themselves as Christians.

Amen.