

# Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

## The Presentation of the Lord

### **First reading:**

(Malachi 3.1-4)

*The Coming of the Lord*

This first reading from Malachi is dire and threatening. The Lord will come to his Temple and refine it.

The reading seems to fit better the coming of Jesus to cleanse the Temple in the final days of his ministry than the coming of the child Jesus in helpless innocence. Yet the searing, final coming is already presaged in the coming of the young Jesus to the Temple to be greeted by Simeon as the fulfilment of God's promise of salvation or completion.

Malachi prophesied the purging of the sons of Levi, and no one can deny that a dreadful purging of the sons of Levi took place at the Sack of Jerusalem in 70AD. They had failed to recognize their Lord.

This cannot but give us pause to reflect whether we, who have theoretically committed ourselves to Christ, have, in fact, responded and been converted and purged. Are we in any way better than those who were condemned and suffered, or are we merely more secretive, better at concealing out faults and secret distortions from others? The thoughts of all hearts will be laid bare in the end. It might be as well to start laying them bare, or purging them now.

### **Question:**

*How is it that the majority of Jews failed to recognize Jesus?*

### **Second reading:**

(Hebrews 2.10-11, 13b-18)

*The Faithful High Priest*

The inclusion of this reading is unbelievably moving: the child presented in the Temple is also to suffer, the sword will pierce Mary's heart. But it is because Jesus is fully human, and now a helpless child, that his loving obedience to the Father will save the human race. 'What was not assumed was not saved', say the Fathers.

In Jesus, the source of our salvation, the disobedience of Adam was washed away. Adam is the representative of us all, personifying the human race. Adam's sin is the myth or analysis of the sin of us all, and Jesus had to be like his brothers and sisters, to share their full human nature if he were to save their human nature. He shared our baby helplessness, our adolescent anguish, our fear of death, our loss of friends whom we thought were faithful. In all this, he knit himself into the human race, and by taking it upon himself, saved it by joining it once more into the Father's love.

The language of high priesthood is used in this Letter to the Hebrews because the letter is written to Hebrews who were pining for the rituals of the Temple. But the priesthood is radically different, according to the order of Melchizedek (an unknown priesthood), in the line of Aaron.

### **Question:**

*What was the purpose of Jesus' death?*

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## **Gospel:**

*(Luke 2.22-40)*

### *The Child Destined for the Rise and Fall of Many*

The story of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple is dominated by Simeon's welcome: 'a light to enlighten the gentiles and the glory of your people Israel', and by his warning to Mary: 'a sword will pierce your heart'. Simeon reiterates the angel's promise that the child would fulfil the destiny of Israel and Israel's task to the nations.

Much like any family life, the promised future included the delights of the growing, developing child, and the background fear that the great destiny of each child may include sorrow and even heartbreak.

How much did Mary and Joseph know about the precious child they were nurturing? As he grew to independence, did he become more loving and supportive? How did his contemporaries find him? Was he a leader? Did he stand out from the pack?

Each of us has a private picture of the child, the boy, the adolescent, the young man. If he were fully human, he had the same frustrations and worries as every child growing in youth and through puberty. All we know for sure is that 'the child grew to maturity', and that Mary 'pondered all these things in her heart', with Simeon's welcome and warning before her mind.

## **Reflection:**

*Imagine Jesus' first serious conversation as an enquiring child with Mary.*

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