

PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

February 2, 2020 A

Facilitator: *Let us take a minute to consciously acknowledge that we are in the presence of God and ask him to help us to hear the Word he wants us to hear this week.*

Pause for a moment and then play a religious song.

Opening prayer: *All powerful Father, Christ your Son became man for us and was presented in the temple. May he free our hearts from sin and bring us into your presence. We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.*

Response to last week's Word: [Facilitator briefly recalls last week's Gospel.] *Let us spend a few minutes sharing how the Word we heard God speak to us last week has unfolded in our lives during the week.*

Facilitator reads focus statement: When solemnities, like the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple, fall on a Sunday during Ordinary Time, they take precedence over that Sunday. The significance of this feast is brought out in the first reading which speaks of the Lord coming to occupy his Temple. In the Gospel, God comes to his Temple in the form of the Infant Jesus. In the second reading, Jesus is presented as the high priest who removes the sins of his people.

Let us listen to God's Word to hear what it is he wants to say to us in these readings today. As you hear a word, you may want to underline it or write it down to remember.

Read the first reading, the psalm and the second reading, pausing briefly after each one.

FIRST READING: Malachi 3:1-4

Like many of his colleagues, the prophet Malachi has the difficult task of speaking an unwelcome message to the leaders and people of his time. In this post-exilic community, the liturgical and communal life of the people has deteriorated to such an extent that the prophet has to call to task the laxity of the clergy. In today's reading, the prophet speaks about a "messenger" who will come to prepare a way for the Lord, who will in turn cleanse his Temple of sinful practices so that worthy worship can once again be offered. Christians, in retrospect, saw the messenger as John the Baptist who prepared the way for Jesus and who in time would cleanse the Temple of beggars and sellers.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM 24

This is a psalm of praise to the King of Glory.

SECOND READING: Hebrews 2:14-18

As a result of the "Fall," all human beings came under the power of Satan, especially when they sinned. They also lived in the shadow of "fear of death." When Jesus came, he totally shared our human condition even to the point of death. But when God raised Jesus up, he broke the power of death and the hold that Satan had on humanity. Through his

saving work, Jesus becomes a *merciful* and *faithful* high priest before God. Jesus' faithfulness should be a model to all who may be tempted to despair in a time of persecution.

PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40

As we listen to this first reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our minds for the content.

**A participant reads the Gospel,
then all pause to reflect.**

As we listen to this second reading of the Gospel, let us listen with our hearts to what Jesus is saying to us. Be aware of what draws us in and what part of the Gospel might be a challenge to embrace. You may want to underline or write down the word you hear.

GOSPEL: Luke 2:22-40

Because Mary and Joseph are devout Jews, they are obedient to the laws of their religious tradition. So this holy family makes the journey to the Temple to fulfill three different religious rites all related to the birth of Jesus: *purification, redemption and presentation.*

Purification. In biblical religions, contact with blood made a person unclean and ineligible to enter the

Temple for worship. Bringing to the Temple a “sin offering”—a pair of turtle doves or two young pigeons (the offering for a poor couple)—cleanses Mary and restores her to the worshipping community.

Redemption. According to Ex 13:1-2, every male child belongs to God and must be “brought back” (redeemed); a male child is redeemed at the end of one month for five sanctuary shekels (Nm 18:16). Luke mentions no payment for Jesus for he already belongs to God. Luke downplays the redemption ritual by saying that the purpose of the visit to Jerusalem is to present Jesus to the Lord as it is written in the law of the Lord (2:22-23).

Presentation. Technically, there is neither any biblical law nor any known custom pertaining to the presentation of a child in the Temple. Luke is using this language to allude to the story of Hannah presenting her child Samuel to Eli for service at the Sanctuary (1Sam 1:22-24). Luke’s purpose is to show that the Holy Family is obedient to the law of the Lord. This obedience to God in all things will characterize Jesus’ life and bring his mission to completion on the Cross.

This story also signals Jesus’ single-minded devotion to his Father and how that must transcend even his devotion to his earthly parents.

Finally, the story features two very devout Jews who have waited all their lives for this moment. *Simeon* means “God has heard.” He speaks an ominous word to Mary about “*a sword that will pierce her heart*”—an obvious reference to the sufferings Mary will endure because she is the mother of Jesus. A prophetess, *Anna*, whose name means “grace or favor,” is presented as the ideal Jewess. Being widowed, childless and old, she is totally dependent on God’s mercy and perfectly equipped to recognize it when it appears. She heralds the Child as the One who will redeem Jerusalem.

FAITH-SHARING QUESTIONS

1. Turn to the person next to you and share what word/s or image/s in the readings caught your attention. Did they comfort or challenge you or touch you in some way?

The facilitator can decide which is more helpful: to share the next questions with the whole group, or to share in smaller groups of three or four.

2. “*Lo! I am sending you as a messenger to prepare the way before you.*” How are you or how can you be a messenger of the Lord?

3. Who are the Anna’s and Simeon’s in your life and/or parish? What role do they play?

4. In the Gospel, Simeon says to Mary that because of her Child, her heart will be pierced with sorrow. What actions of children can pierce the heart of a parent? Do you have a personal experience you can share?

5. Name one thing today’s Gospel says to us that we disciples of Jesus need to heed and act on.

RESPONDING TO GOD’S WORD

Share with the person next to you one way you can act on this week’s readings. Suggestion: Write a note of thanks to one of the Anna’s and Simeon’s in your life, thanking them for their ministry of care.

JOURNALING. *Having listened to God’s Word and listened to others’ reflections on it, take a quiet moment to reflect on what you are hearing God say to you. Your response will be what you bring to Eucharist on Sunday, asking Jesus to help you respond as he asks of you. When ready, jot down your reflections.*

PRAYING WITH THE WORD

FACILITATOR: Let us now pause to see how something(s) said in the reading might lead us into shared prayer. Suggestion: *Loving God, help us to be like Simeon and Anna, prophetic in our own way and prayerful. Help us to be your messenger in our world.*

CONCLUDE WITH PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, PETITION AND INTERCESSION

Facilitator: Let us now conclude with prayers of thanksgiving, petition and intercession. What are we grateful for? For what and for whom do we wish to pray?

Especially pray for parents and teenagers who are experiencing difficulties in their relationships. Pray for homeless and runaway teens.

CLOSING PRAYER (together)

*God of glory
on this day of presentation,
we present ourselves to you.
Purify us to become more holy.
We see in others what beauty
a lifetime of grace can create.
We want to be like that.
Lead us in your everlasting way.
Amen.*