

The Presentation of the Lord

A few years ago explorers opened an Egyptian tomb which had been closed for three thousand years. There stood an exquisitely carved coffin of a little child with this inscription: 'Oh my life, my love, my little one, would to God I had died instead of thee'. Love and sorrow are as old as mankind.

Simeon in today's gospel prophesies the sorrow which Mary will go through on Calvary, 'this child, he said, is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel' and turning to Mary he says 'a sword will pierce your own soul too' which is precisely what happened. When the centurion's sword pierced the actual heart of Jesus, a sword pierced Mary's heart at the same time. Even though her soul 'rejoiced in God, her saviour' she is also referred to as the mother of sorrows. Mary in this sense shares intimately in her Son's Passion.

In the mass we celebrate the Death of Jesus and unite ourselves with his offering of himself to the Father. Our Temple is the Church and at every mass in dying more to ourselves drawing us closer to Jesus in his sacrifice. Because of the frailty of our human nature and our attachment to sin, howsoever small, our offering or presentation will never be totally pure, at least this side of the grave.

But this is where we need the grace of Jesus coming to us through the Mass. The second reading tells us that Jesus really shared in our human nature and was beset with all sorts of temptations and trials similar to the ones which we encounter in our daily lives. He was like us in all things but sin. Our participation in the Mass will be our antidote against these weaknesses. We won't as easily succumb to temptation as we might if Christ were distant from us. The second Reading also says that Christ atoned for our sins as a result of which he becomes a fountain of mercy for all who want to quench their thirst for this divine pardon. So when we present ourselves to

God at this and every Mass, that fountain of mercy gushes forth.

But receiving the mercy of God is not magic but oftentimes it needs to be preceded by fasting and prayer. The prophetess Anna, in the in the gospel today never left the temple serving God night and day with fasting and prayer. If we present ourselves to God each Sunday having fasted and prayed beforehand, we will be more receptive and open to receive his divine forgiveness and healing.

The end of the reading today tells us that Mary, Joseph and Jesus, on leaving the temple went back to Nazareth. When we leave the church we too have to go back to our ordinary everyday lives and be a sign to others of the mercy and love of Christ which we have received.