

PRESENTATION AT THE TEMPLE – 2nd February 2020

MY EYES HAVE SEEN YOUR SALVATION - Biblical Commentary by Father Alberto Maggi OSM

Luke 2,22-40

And when the time came for their purification according to the Law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, "Every male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord") and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the Law of the Lord, "a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons." Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the Law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him. And Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), so that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed."

And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with her husband seven years from when she was a virgin, and then as a widow until she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

And when they had performed everything according to the Law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth. And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favour of God was upon him.

Despite the extraordinary experience of the Spirit that Jesus' parents had, in particular his mother, they are still anchored in the tradition of the people, which sees the relationship with God based on observance and obedience to his law.

In this episode, the evangelist wants to anticipate and portray, the difficulty that Jesus will have in proposing to his people a different relationship with God, no longer based on obedience of his laws, but on the acceptance of his Spirit and his love. .

Here then, the evangelist, in the episode known as the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, presents two contrary groups: one portrayed by the parents of Jesus, who lead the child to perform an unnecessary rite, because they intend to make him Abraham's son the one who instead is already the Son of God. And on the other hand, the man of the Spirit, Simeon, intent on preventing the unnecessary rite. The parents go for the purification of the mother - because the birth of a child made the mother impure and therefore the woman had to purify herself through an offer, and here is the offer of the poorest, of a couple of turtle doves - and above all to pay the redemption of the son. In fact every male firstborn, the Lord wanted him for himself. If the parents wanted him, they had to pay him the equivalent of twenty working days, that is, five shekels.

Well the evangelist, while Mary and Joseph with the child go to the Temple to perform this rite, presents us with surprise, " Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon,.. " the name Simeon, means "the Lord has listened", he is the man of the Spirit, who tries to prevent the

useless rite. In fact, Simeon takes the child in his arms, while the parents wanted to fulfil everything of the law, and utters a prophecy that leaves his parents perplexed. He says to Jesus that he will be “*..glory to your people Israel.*” and this Mary and Joseph knew, was the task of the Messiah, of the Son of God, but, the novelty, “*..a light for revelation to the Gentiles.*”

The love of God, Simeon announces, is universal, it is no longer for a people - the chosen people - but it is for all humanity. Therefore the enemies of Israel, that is the gentiles, will no longer have to be - as they believed, as tradition presented - to be dominated, but welcomed by brothers.

Then Simeon gives Maria a blessing, which ends in a rather sinister way. He says that Jesus, and depicts him to what Luke later in his gospel will present as "a stone", a stone that can be corner stone , which is used for construction, or a stone that makes people stumble, makes them fall.

And in fact he will say of Jesus that “*...this child is appointed for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is opposed (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also),*”

What is the meaning of this sword that pierces the whole life of Mary? The sword, both in the Old and New Testaments, is a figure of the Word of God, which is effective as a sword, the author of the letter to the Hebrews will say, that “*... the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*” (Hebrews 4,12)

So Simeon to Mary, who represents the people of Israel, announces the word of this Son for hers will be like a sword that will force her to make choices, and very painful choices. In fact, in the next episode the evangelist will present, the finding of Jesus in the Temple, it will indeed be that the first and only discourse that Jesus will address to his mother that will be words of reproach. Mary’s painful journey will be long Mary must understand that being mother of the Son she must become a disciple. A long and painful journey, like a sword that pierces the soul.