



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
ON THE OCCASION OF THE 18th DAY OF CONSECRATED LIFE

HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS

Vatican Basilica
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Video

The Feast of the Presentation of Jesus at the Temple is also known as the Feast of the *Encounter*: the Liturgy says at the beginning that Jesus goes to meet his people. Thus, this is the encounter *between Jesus and his people*, when Mary and Joseph brought their child to the Temple in Jerusalem; the first encounter between Jesus and his people, represented by Simeon and Anna, took place.

It was also the first encounter within the history of the people, a meeting *between the young and the old*: the young were Mary and Joseph with their infant son and the old were Simeon and Anna, two people who often went to the Temple.

Let's observe what the evangelist Luke tells us of them, as he describes them. He says four times that Our Lady and St Joseph *wanted to do what was required by the Law of the Lord* (cf. Lk 2:22, 23, 24, 27). One almost feels and perceives that Jesus' parents have the joy of observing the precepts of God, yes, the joy of walking according to the Law of the Lord! They are two newlyweds, they have just had their baby, and they are motivated by the desire to do what is prescribed. This is not an external fact; it is not just to feel right, no! It's a strong desire, a deep desire, full of joy. That's what the Psalm says: "In the way of thy testimonies I delight.... For thy law is my delight" (119 [118]:14, 77).

And what does St Luke say of the elderly? He underlines, more than once, that *they were guided by the Holy Spirit*. He says Simeon was a righteous and devout man, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and that “the Holy Spirit was upon him” (2:25). He says that “it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit” that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord’s Christ” (v. 26); and finally that he went to the Temple “inspired by the Spirit “(v. 27). He says Anna was a “prophetess” (v. 36); that is she was inspired by God and that she was always “worshipping with fasting and prayer” in the Temple (v. 37). In short, these two elders are full of life! They are full of life because they are enlivened by the Holy Spirit, obedient to his action, sensitive to his calls....

And now there is the encounter between the Holy Family and the two representatives of the holy people of God. Jesus is at the centre. It is he who moves everything, who draws all of them to the Temple, the house of his Father.

It is a meeting between the young, who are full of joy in observing the Law of the Lord, and the elderly who are full of joy in the action of the Holy Spirit. It is *a unique encounter between observance and prophecy*, where young people are the observers and the elderly are prophets! In fact, if we think carefully, observance of the Law is animated by the Spirit and the prophecy moves forward along the path traced by the Law. Who, more than Mary, is full of the Holy Spirit? Who more than she is docile to its action?

In the light of this Gospel scene, let us look at *consecrated life* as an encounter with Christ: it is he who comes to us, led by Mary and Joseph, and we go towards him guided by the Holy Spirit. He is at the centre. He moves everything, he draws us to the Temple, to the Church, where we can meet him, recognize him, welcome him, embrace him.

Jesus comes to us in the Church through the foundational charism of an Institute: it is nice to think of our vocation in this way! Our encounter with Christ took shape in the Church through the charism of one of her witnesses. This always amazes us and makes us give thanks.

And in the consecrated life we live the encounter between the young and the old, between observation and prophecy. Let’s not see these as two opposing realities! Let us rather allow the Holy Spirit to animate both of them, and a sign of this is joy: the joy of observing, of walking within a rule of life; the joy of being led by the Spirit, never unyielding, never closed, always open to the voice of God that speaks, that opens, that leads us and invites us to go towards the horizon.

It’s good for the elderly to communicate their wisdom to the young; and it’s good for the young people to gather this wealth of experience and wisdom, and to carry it forward, not so as to safeguard it in a museum, but to carry it forward addressing the challenges that life brings, to carry it forward for the sake of the respective religious orders and of the whole Church.

May the grace of this mystery, the mystery of the Encounter, enlighten us and comfort us on our

journey. Amen.

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