

# "Presented to the Lord"

Luke 2:22-32

February 2, 2014

The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of Our Lord

I hear tell there's a football game today in which many people are interested. Many will be watching it on television from bars, restaurants, or their couches. However, suppose you wanted to go to New York, present yourself at the main gate of MetLife Stadium where the game is to be played, and expect to watch the game with Roger Goodell, the commissioner of the NFL in his luxury sky box (or, out in the elements where he has said he will watch the game to identify with the common fan).

Such a plan (or fantasy) would not only be out of touch with reality, but it would be impossible to carry out. First of all, you couldn't get to New York (at least at this late moment). Secondly, you couldn't present yourself at the main gate and expect to get in. You couldn't afford it. And, thirdly, do you really expect that Roger Goodell would be interested in watching the game with some random fan from Montana? I don't think so.

Such a scenario about presenting yourself at a secularly sacred site, not being able to afford entrance, and not being able to access the man running the show might help might help you understand the rarely celebrated church festival which we observe today: The Purification of Mary and the Presentation of our Lord. You may not have even remembered the story of these events until you heard it read in our Gospel reading for today.

Why did the Church choose such a seemingly minor event in the lives of Mary and Jesus and set aside a day in the church calendar for them? What meaning might it have for our lives? There's actually a lot here. Setting aside the Purification of Mary for another sermon, let's look at the Presentation of Our Lord. What's it all about?

The history of this practice in the life of Israel goes all the way back to the Exodus. Remember the 10<sup>th</sup> plague that the Lord inflicted on the nation of Egypt? All the first born males, both animal and human, were killed by the Angel of Death. However, because of the blood of the lamb painted on the

door frames of the houses belonging to the children of Israel, the Angel of Death “passed over” and the first born in those homes were saved.

However, immediately after bringing the people out of Egypt, “the LORD said to Moses, “Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.” (Exodus 13:1-2) All first born children belonged to the Lord in remembrance of God sparing the first born in Egypt. If parents wanted to have their child back, they would have to present him at the temple 40 days after birth and redeem him, that is, buy him back. The price, according to Numbers 18:16, was 5 silver shekels. (The sacrifice mentioned in our text was for the purification of Mary, a story for another sermon.)

So, in addition to going through the ritual to make Mary spiritually pure after childbirth, the parents of Jesus bring Him to the temple 40 days after His birth to present Him to the Lord and redeem Him. What does this all have to do with us? Several things are noteworthy about this.

First, Jesus, although true God, could not come and present Himself in the temple. Since this took place about a month after birth, the fact that He was truly human - an infant - would prevent Him from doing this. Someone had to bring Him and present Him – in this case, His parents.

Secondly, Jesus could not redeem Himself. Again, being truly human and only a child, Jesus did not have the means with which to pay the redemption price. Someone had to pay the 5 silver shekels for him. In this case again, it was his parents.

Thirdly, like many other things Jesus did – being born in human flesh and being tempted as our Epistle reading says, Jesus did not do this for Himself. Jesus did not need to be presented to the Lord and redeemed because He is the Lord Himself and not in need of redemption. Yet Jesus voluntarily was born under the Law and submitted Himself to the Law for you and for me so that He could present us to the Lord.

Like every other child presented to the Lord, none of us could present ourselves to the Lord. Only it's not because we were infants that prevented us from presenting us to the Lord. It is our sin

and rebellion against God that does it. It is all the times we break the Law of God and do what is wrong, no matter how much we try to justify our actions or how much the world justifies our actions for us. It is all the times when we fail to obey the Law of God and do what is right no matter what our excuse is. If we try to present ourselves to the Lord with all of this sin draped on us, we will surely die. God does not allow sin in His presence and will wipe it out.

Like every other child redeemed at his presentation, none of us could pay the redemption price. It's not that we couldn't afford the 5 shekels. According to one commentator, five shekels translates over into \$2.50 of our money. It's that the cost of redemption from the wrath and judgment of God is much higher than 5 shekels. It requires the payment of a perfect, complete, all-sufficient redemption price, a price only a human being would be liable for, a price only God Himself could pay. That's why Jesus shared in our flesh and blood so he could pay the redemption price for us and in our place. As St. Peter wrote, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect." (1 Peter 1:18-19)

Because Jesus was brought to the temple, presented to the Lord and redeemed, He is now able to bring us to God, present us to Him, and pay the redemption price for us so that we might enjoy life in His presence forever.

Jesus initially presented us to the Lord in our baptisms. Through His presentation of Himself upon the cross, Jesus is able to cleanse us from our sin in the waters of Holy Baptism and present us and all believers as His Holy Church to a holy Lord. It is as Paul writes to the Ephesians, "Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:25-27)

As we live our lives, although we are in conflict with God because of our sins, Jesus' sacrifice of His body on the cross continues to reconcile us with Him by making peace between Him and us

through that same body which is fed to us with His blood in His Supper. Weekly, we come here to be presented by Jesus to the Lord as His holy people through the forgiveness of sins. As Paul wrote to the Colossians, “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.” (Colossians 1:22)

Most important, as we travel through this life to its conclusion, rather than being afraid of the prospect of death, we face death with confidence and hope. For Jesus, who presented us to the Lord in our baptisms and who continued to re-present us day after day, year after year, through the forgiveness of sins which He continues to offer us without measure in His Word and Sacraments, will be there to present us to the Lord on the Last Day so that we might be in His glorious presence forever. We rejoice in that promise and live with hope as we say along with the Apostle Jude, “Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever.” (Jude 24)

Presenting yourself at the entrance to the Super Bowl, affording the price to gain entrance, and watching the game with Roger Goodell, as insane as that would seem to be, would be a snap compared with presenting yourself to the Lord, affording the redemption price, and living with the Lord forever. Yet this impossible thing is what Jesus has made happen for each of us. His presentation in the temple, the payment of the redemption price, and being received by the Lord all foreshadow what He ultimately came to do. He presented Himself on a cross. He earned the redemption price by His death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. He gives that price to us and for us in water, Word, bread, and wine so that He might present us to the Lord now, keep us in His presence throughout life, and present us to live in His glory forever and ever. Amen