

Archbishop Lori's Homily: Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary; Senior Leadership Retreat Day

Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Senior Leadership Retreat Day

Shrine of St. Anthony, Ellicott City

November 21, 2017

This morning we celebrate a beautiful feast day of the Blessed Virgin Mary namely, the Feast of Mary's Presentation in the Temple. It is an event which illumines our Christian imagination: that wonderful and grace-filled moment when Saints Joachim and Anne presented their daughter, Mary, in the Temple. Let us remind ourselves why Mary's Presentation is exceptional and what this event in salvation history has to do with us and our ministry.

Joachim and Anne, Mary's parents, were part of a remnant of God's People who looked forward with eager anticipation to the coming of the Messiah. Their hope and trust in God's promises of deliverance were undimmed by the catastrophes that befell the people of Israel - whether it was exile, or the desecration of the Temple, or suppression and conquest by foreign powers. Through it all, the faith of this holy remnant—far from fading—grew ever more vibrant and ever more expectant.

So, while every faithful parent sees the hope and joy of God's love shining on the faces of their precious children, I would wager that, when Joachim and Anne beheld the pure and beautiful face of their daughter Mary, they experienced a wonder and awe they could neither describe nor explain. What deep thoughts and emotions must have filled their hearts as they entrusted her completely to the Lord, the God of Israel! Could they have sensed deep-down that their daughter was already "full of grace"? Could they have sensed she would play a special role in salvation history?

Like other children, Mary was presented in the Temple when she was about three years old but hers was no ordinary Presentation. To echo the Prophet Zechariah, Mary entered as the Daughter of Zion and her coming to the Temple signaled that the time was at hand for God to 'stir from his heavenly dwelling' and to be present to humanity in a new and unimaginable way: the Eternal Son would take upon himself our human nature in Mary's womb. The Word would become flesh and dwell among us. He would come to preach, heal, suffer, die and rise - for us and for our salvation. And so, in God's providential design, Mary arrived at the Temple as the blessed and chosen daughter who would herself become a temple, a sinless dwelling place, a tabernacle prepared for the Lord of Hosts.

Joachim and Anne could indeed only wonder what lay in store for their daughter, but we can draw two insights from today's feast: first is that Mary would find her vocation within the loving home, the domestic church, if you will, that Joachim and Anne prepared for her. And second, is that our faith in Christ helps us understand Mary's unique vocation; conversely, turn Mary's unwavering faith and dedication to God's saving will illuminates our faith in Christ (CCC № 487) . . . a word about each.

While Scripture is silent about the specifics of Mary's childhood, nonetheless we can infer from many other sources that the home created by Saints Joachim and Anne was a place of faith and love, a place where Mary's unique vocation would be nourished and come to fruition. It would never have occurred to Joachim & Anne to call their home a domestic church but that, in fact, is what they created - a safe harbor, a place of peace where Mary's vocation to root in her heart, an environment of prayer and reverence where Mary could hear the Word of God, learn to worship in spirit and truth, and acquire an exquisite charity, a love for others, a charity she would manifest as she reached out to her cousin Elizabeth, as she helped the newly married couple at Cana, and as she stood beneath the Cross with the beloved disciple John.

Pope Benedict taught us that the Church has three interconnected dimensions: she cherishes and proclaims God's Word; she worships in spirit and truth; and she engages in a life of generous love, especially for the poor and vulnerable. This is what Mary witnessed and learned in her parents' home, lessons that resonated in her sinless heart and in God's mysterious providence prepared Mary to become the

ultimate model of the Church. As Pope Francis taught, “Mary is the model of the Church ‘in the order of faith, charity, and perfect union with Christ.’” (Wed. Aud. 23 X 2013) Mediating on this mystery, let us redouble our efforts to strengthen the domestic church, the family, in this Archdiocese – to make our homes places where young people are evangelized and catechized, led deeply into the church’s sacramental life, & where they learn to give of themselves in love to the vocation God calls them to.

And, as we seek to evangelize more vigorously in our pastorates and seek in God’s grace to create missionary disciples capable of encountering others and walking with them, leading them to Christ and to the Church – as we seek to engage this mission – let us hasten in prayer to Mary, for as the Catechism of the Catholic Church teaches, “What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what she believes about Christ and what she teaches about Mary illumines in turn her faith in Christ” (op. cit.).

For Mary always leads us to Jesus. It was to this mission that her life was dedicated as she was presented in the Temple. From her parents, Mary learned to trust in God’s promise of salvation and to live in faithful expectation that those promises would be fulfilled. And so she mediated on God’s Word before she conceived him in her womb. Sinless from the moment of conception, Mary absorbed the Word as no other and lived in completely harmony with the saving will of the Father.

Mary, whose soul proclaimed the greatness of the Lord and whose spirit found joy in God her Savior, ... now beckons us. By devotion to Mary, the Star of Evangelization, let us rediscover every day our vocation to evangelize. By mediating the mysteries of the Rosary, let us learn from Mary how to worship in spirit and truth. By following Mary’s example of love, let us learn to practice a charity that evangelizes. With Mary’s prayer and example to guide and strengthen us, we too will proclaim the greatness of the Lord and our spirits will find joy in God our Savior ...and in the process we too will lead many to Jesus and the Church.

Let us conclude with the beautiful prayer of Fr. Jacques Olier, the founder of the Suplicians, a prayer written with today’s feast in mind:

“O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in your servants.

In the spirit of your holiness, in the fullness of your might,
in the truth of your virtues, in the perfection of your ways,
in the communion of your mysteries.

Come and subdue every hostile power
in your Spirit for the glory of the Father. Amen.”