

Homily for November 21, 2017

Today the Church marks the Presentation of Mary in the Temple as a girl of three. Although there is no accurate historical record for this Feast, the theme of the day is one that does have biblical precedence. What was foremost in Mary's her mind and heart was discipleship. Her being presented to the priests in the Jerusalem Temple as a three year old help[s to underscore this total devotion to the Lord.

St Augustine in pondering our Lady's discipleship wrote:

Indeed the blessed Mary certainly did the Father's will, and so it was for her a greater thing to have been Christ's disciple than to have been his mother, and she was more blessed in her discipleship than in her motherhood. Hers was the happiness of first bearing in her womb him whom she would obey as her master.

The word disciple has an interesting etymology. It means to set oneself apart to learn. Mary chose to be in the world but not belong to the world. Disciples learn to practise a kind of detachment that Mary epitomized. They detach themselves from the world to consecrate themselves totally to the Lord. Listen again to what St Augustine says about Mary's total consecration:

Mary heard God's word and kept it, and so she is blessed. She kept God's truth in her mind, a nobler thing than carrying his body in her womb. The truth and the body were both Christ: he was kept in Mary's mind insofar as he is truth, he was carried in her womb insofar as he is man; but what is kept in the mind is of a higher order than what is carried in the womb.

Disciples are people who like Mary have their minds conformed to the will of the Saviour. This is something we see happening in the life of Zacchaeus who responds warmly to the Lord's request to come home with him. This is another dimension of discipleship, when we truly allow Jesus into our homes. When we do this we experience what is called metanoia. **Meta** means "transformation", and **noia** means mind. This is what we also call conversion. Each of us is invited to this kind of deepening conversion where we want above all else to have our minds transformed by the loving presence of Jesus. For Zacchaeus such metanoia changed his relationship to wealth and he chose to leave behind a life of miserly grasping and became a man of extravagant generosity.

In the first reading from 2 Maccabees we see the heroic courage of Eleazar. We read that he was a scribe. A man who therefore studied God's word with great care and diligence. At a time when the influence of Antiochus Epiphanies, a sinister Greek King who wanted to eradicate Jewish culture and religion, Eleazar epitomized the meaning of discipleship. Listen again to his perspective:

Even if for the present I would avoid the punishment of mortals, yet whether I live or die I will not escape the hands of the Almighty. 27 Therefore, by bravely giving up my life now, I will

show myself worthy of my old age 28 and leave to the young a noble example of how to die a good death willingly and nobly for the revered and holy laws.”

To live and die for the revered and holy laws of God. How we need in this generation Christians who will live with the kind of conviction and courage of an Eleazar. Christians who are always open to the transforming presence of the Holy Spirit. Christians who don't just believe in Jesus but also belong to him by detaching ourselves from the world and consecrating themselves to Jesus Christ.

This Feast of the Presentation of Mary calls us to embrace a life of courageous discipleship which might seem like utter madness to some, but is for us the source of a life, that like Eleazar's, can be described as one of nobility and courage.

Today renew your decision to live as a disciple of Jesus and so emulate our Lady's whole-hearted devotion and obedience.