

## Homily For Tuesday of Octave of Christmas - Year I

### St Peter's 8:30AM Mass - Dec 29, 2020

**1 Jn 2:3-11** "Whoever hates a brother or sister walks in darkness and does not know the way to go. "

**Ps 96:1-6** "All the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens."

**Luke 2:22-35** "The child will be a sign that will be opposed and will reveal the inner thoughts of many."

### Light in the Darkness

#### Introduction

It may seem at this moment in history that obedience is only about wearing masks and physical distancing, but there is something much more important that today's scriptures tell us. Obedience to the law of love is light itself. Disobedience to that law is darkness.

#### Obedience to the Law

We begin with the obedience of Mary and Joseph. We already know how each of them makes Christmas the defining event of God's entry into history, how they say yes participate in God's plan to bring the saviour into the world.

Today we see further how this obedience changes the world. We witness Mary offering the sacrifice after giving birth. The two turtledoves are the sacrifice required of the poor. This reminds us of the lowly born state into which Jesus is born. It's a poor family, but they do what is required of a poor family.

Then we see how Mary and Joseph fulfil the law completely. They bring their child to the temple to dedicate him as holy to the Lord. And of course this has great significance because Jesus IS the holy one of God. Their obedience matches the reality of who Jesus is, thus fulfilling what the angel said to her about him.

In John's Gospel and in his letters, this obedience is taken to a profound new level. The test, as it were, for knowing Jesus is keeping his commandments. Is it a new commandment? In one way it is not because, as you know, Jesus summed up the entire Old Testament as: Love God with your whole heart and love your

neighbour as yourself. But John indicates it is also a new law, because now it is the very mark of the Christian. It identifies him or her as belonging to Christ.

Keeping God's commandments is the way to know God. This kind of knowing is intimate. It is a deep and personal relationship. The commandment to love, which John hammers at tirelessly, amounts to imitating Christ, to living as he did.

### **Light and Darkness**

In the temple, Mary and Joseph meet Simeon. The Holy Spirit leads him to them and to the holy child. Simeon has been waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Greek word for this consolation is *paraclesis*, from which comes *paraclete*, which is the Holy Spirit, the consoler. Isaiah's prophecies throughout Advent have been about the one who brings the consolation of the Spirit after bad news. Could we use a dose of that consolation right now? I think so, and our Christmas celebration tells us that he has given it.

Simeon recognizes that God has kept his promise of this consolation, which John describes as a light to the nations, which darkness cannot extinguish. The light of Christ shines in the darkness. The messiah will complete the mission that has been left unfulfilled, which is to be a light, or a blessing, to the nations. We are the members of those nations.

But Simeon declares to Mary and Joseph that the Messiah in their arms will divide every person in Israel and on earth. Those who reject him will stand condemned, because they have rejected love itself. And those who embrace him will be blessed.

### **Love and Hate and Self Deception**

The implication in John's writing is that one does not accidentally end up in disobedience. It is a deliberate move towards darkness. This is the theme of humanity from the beginning. Walking in the light is the same as loving one's brother or sister. Hatred of brother is what happens when we allow ourselves to be deceived by the devil, who opposes God and hates the truth.

We see this from the beginning. God asks Adam: Did you disobey? Did you eat the fruit I told you not to eat? Adam's answer indicates he has given in to self deception: The woman you gave me, gave me the fruit and I ate it. God asks Eve: What is this you have done? She answers: The serpent tricked me. God asks Cain: Where is your brother? Cain answers: Am I my brother's keeper? And Genesis ends with ten brothers selling into slavery the one brother who annoyed them with his dreams of superiority. What happened to him, Jacob asks after his son? Animals killed and ate him.

John is speaking of human hatred, human disobedience, human self deception, human lies, and walking in the self created darkness, away from the light. Do not hate brother or sister, and especially another believer. This is darkness and blindness. To hate another believer is like hating Christ.

### **Life Giving Suffering**

Finally, Simeon also has a prophecy for Mary. The messiah will suffer for love, for the light, and that sword of suffering will pierce her own heart. The Christmas story tells us that Mary gave birth to Jesus and laid him in a manger and covered him in swaddling clothes because there was no room for him in the inn. St. Pope John Paul II explains that this is the first of the sorrows Mary would experience as a mother. There was no room for the saviour of the world. This looks familiar today. In so many places in our society there is still no room for Jesus.

The self sacrificing love of Christians for one another, based on Jesus' love for them was a novelty which caused the Gentiles to exclaim: See how these Christians love one another thus the hymn they will know we are Christians by our love. Failure to love removes one from the light of Christ.

## Call To Action

The world is going to need us to love one another. If we claim the name Christ, then we need to show the world how to walk in his way, which is love.

God is saying, not to Joseph and Mary, but to all of us no matter the circumstances we have had to deal with: I have already given you the mission to become saints, to walk with Jesus and your brothers and sisters in love.

We are only asked to be obedient to the task that is already in front of us. The grace is there to live that life as well as possible.

## Key Passages

**Entrance Antiphon:** *God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, so that all who believe in him may not perish, but may have eternal life.*

**Collect:** *Almighty and invisible God, who dispersed the darkness of this world by the coming of your light ...*

**1 John:** *My little children ... Whoever says: I have come to know God, but do not obey his commandments, is a liar ... Whoever says: I abide in him ought to walk just as he walked ... Yet I am writing you a new commandment, because the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness.*

**Psalms:** *O sing to the Lord. Tell of his salvation from day to day ... All the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens.*

**Luke:** *Mary and Joseph brought Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ... Simeon was righteous and devout, looking forward to the consolation of Israel ... Guided by the Spirit, Simeon came into the temple. When the parents brought in the child Jesus, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God: Master, my eyes have seen your salvation, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel. The child's father and mother were amazed. Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary: This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.*