

**Homily**  
**December 29, 2021**

I John 2:3-11

Psalm 96

Luke 2:22-35

The Fifth Day in the Octave of Christmas

In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the children, adults, and catechists ponder the Infancy narratives every year during Advent.

And every year the 7- and 8-year-olds are quick to tell me:

“You already told us that. We already know these Bible stories”

I say: “I know...but I wonder if there could be something we might have missed. Another secret God wants us to know. Another mystery for us to discover. Let’s see...”

Of course, we know these familiar and foundational stories. Yet, every time we read them, hear them proclaimed, sing about them, put out the little figures—something more happens, doesn’t it?

So again, today, The Presentation of Jesus in the Temple.... Let’s see...

I was enriched in my study by Pope Francis’ book on the *Gospel of Luke* and Elizabeth Johnson in her marvelous work on Mary: *Truly, our Sister*.

We can consider some of the insights of the grandeur of this inexhaustible text in these few minutes together today.

The best part, we already know, is that every Gospel text has something important to do with US. We will come to more sensitive insights in how Jesus is working out God’s dream for us and for our world...even with all the twists and turns of our life experiences and the mix of all that happens.

Among many themes of Light/Darkness, Promise/Fulfillment and the Revelation of Who Jesus really is, there are many powerful allusions hidden in the story. I will just lift up a few of them to set us into our day today.

1. Mary and Joseph were committed to their religious heritage. We see in this presentation, they are fulfilling the customs that surround the birth of a child, welcoming Jesus into the family and publicly into the community.
2. They are religiously observant Jews carrying out the rituals after Jesus’ birth according to the Law of Moses. Two equal dimensions in God’s plan are revealed: “A light to the Gentiles and glory to God’s people Israel.”

So, we see, “the child’s father and mother”—a parenting couple celebrating the prescribed ritual. No other episode better portrays Mary and Joseph as active parents committed to the heritage of their ancestors.

3. We might look for a minute at the ritual offering of the two birds—an indication of their poor status. Wealthy people would offer a first-year lamb. The turtledoves reveal this couple in the lower ranks of society as their social location.
4. Simeon and Anna are a contrast here. Charismatic, mature, wise, led by the Spirit, they intercept the young couple with babe in arms. Simeon, old but with eyes to see says now he is ready to die. God has rewarded him. Anna, old, with a prophet’s heart, goes to work, spreading the Good News all around.
5. What about the prediction of the sword? Elizabeth Johnson’s powerful insight here is this: Simeon’s double-edged sword is more about the struggle of spiritual discernment than about a particular sorrowful and even horrific scene in Jesus’ life.

Discernment: Hearing the Word of God and keeping it does not happen easily but requires struggle to arrive at Wisdom. Mary will be tested in the depths of her faith. She didn’t have automatic knowledge and insight in all the twists and turns of her life or in Jesus’ life.

Mary, like all disciples, will wrestle with hearing, believing and continually pondering the Word of promise even when it pierces her soul like a knife.

6. Let’s think about another dimension here.... that of Mary’s partnership with Joseph. The pronouns throughout the text are plural. “THEY brought the child”, “THEY offered sacrifice”. And references to “the parents”, “the child’s father and mother”.

They are together—two bonded in marriage, adjusting to family life with a new child. They will share life, for better, for worse. And this will be blessed. There is even an implication in the final sentence we heard, that implies years of parenting in their hometown of Nazareth where they would raise Jesus together. They will, as good Jewish parents, in his decisive years of growth, teach him about the compassionate, liberating God that they, as believers, embrace.

Now, finally US...As the text is inexhaustible, so are we, no matter our age, our experiences, our very current situation.

We are believers, immersed in a faith tradition, that someone along the way took care to teach us and to embrace it. We’ve lived a family life, pondered God’s work in our lives, listened to and responded to a call.

We faithfully and lovingly carry out the rituals of beauty and love as the years unfold in our church. As we did in a most profoundly beautiful way this week.

We know about discernment, too. The twists and turns of our lives may not have been crystal clear all the time. Decision making sometimes comes at the end of struggle. Sometimes we made excellent choices, sometimes not so good, but we discerned and maybe even re-discerned.

We've found others in partnerships of life and mission. We don't just go alone. Our important work is every day...in believing, celebrating, and spreading the dream of God's plan of love and liberation.

We ritualize in big, beautiful ways as we love to do, and we ritualize in small daily ways of love as the Apostle John's letters to us every day this week insists and encourages us to do.

Yes-----We've heard this story before, we know it----but maybe there is something more today---a secret, a mystery-----we didn't know before.  
Let's see.