

FEAST OF THE HOLY FAMILY [B]

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In the week before Christmas a little boy who lives near a church had a part in his school's Nativity play. It wasn't a big part - in fact it was just one line: *'Let the crooked be made straight.'* But it seems that he put more work into his one line than any actor before or since. At the performance itself he stood up, and with a big smile on his face, delivered his line perfectly. At the end, at the back of the church-hall, his parish priest asked him how he had found it. He answered proudly: *'I did my part good.'*

That, I think, is what Simeon and Anna are saying to us in today's gospel. They have only small parts to play in the story of salvation. But they played them well, as well as they could. So Simeon can say: *'Now Master, you can let your servant go in peace ... because my eyes have seen the salvation which you have prepared for all the nations to see ...'*

Simeon, then, is thanking God for this special favour: - At the very end of his life, God is letting him meet the Messiah, the Saviour and King of the world. Anna too, another elderly person, is sharing this privilege of meeting the Saviour of the world in the person of the Christ-child. For this special grace she too begins to praise God. But more than that, she speaks to anyone who shows any interest, of the greatness, goodness and destiny of this baby.

For both Simeon and Anna their experience of meeting the Christ-child is one of relief and peace, light and life, hope and joy. In a word, their meeting with Jesus is an experience of being saved. They are also aware that the Christ-child himself is meeting his God in God's own house.

For us who have come together today to celebrate the feast of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the feast is a reminder of all that Christ has meant to us, and all that he continues to mean to us. We came into his presence and company on the day we were led into the House of God to be baptised. We have met him many times since. For example, in the guidance and protection, the goodness and kindness, the love and support, of our parents! In the friendship of many other family members and of many other significant people in our lives! And in things that have happened to us! We have also met Christ in the sacraments we have celebrated, and especially e.g. those of Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Marriage.

It is precisely because of the length and depth of our relationship with Christ, that we can praise God in our Eucharist today with words taken from the Christmas Preface which we will be praying: *'In him we see our God made visible and so are caught up in the love of the God we cannot see.'*

Moreover, it is precisely because of the length and depth of our relationship with Christ that we can ask God in the words of our Prayer after Holy Communion: *'Eternal Father, we want to live as Jesus, Mary, and Joseph in peace with you and one another. May this communion strengthen us to face the troubles of life.'*

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