

COMING HOME: THE PRESENTATION OF THE CHILD JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

Brian Gleeson CP

A man flies to the United States on business. He tells his wife and children he'll be back in five weeks time. As the days go by the whole family misses him more and more. They can hardly wait to see him again. They make plans for a big party to welcome him home. But on the very day he's due to fly back to Australia, word comes through that he has broken his leg in a skiing accident, and is laid up indefinitely in a Colorado hospital. Now, in addition to their longing to see him again, they are sad and worried about when this will be.

Then, one evening when the family is feeling particularly down and particularly quiet with one another, in walks Ross unannounced. One and all they jump up from their chairs and yell with delight. His wife Jenny speaks for everyone when she hugs her husband and says: *'I can't tell you just how marvellous it is to have you here again. It's been so long we were beginning to wonder whether we'd ever see you again. You know, dear, you're our rock. Without you around our home is never the same.'*

That little slice of real life is somewhat similar in detail and meaning to the gospel story today of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Jerusalem temple. It too is a story of coming home, a home-coming which means relief and hope, life and joy for all.

It has this meaning first of all for Simeon and Anna, those elderly true believers who meet and welcome the Christ-child to his Father's house. As Simeon hugs the baby born to save the whole human race, he praises God for letting him at the very end of his life, come face to face with the Messiah, Saviour, and Lord of the world. He cries out in sheer delight:

*'Now, Master, you can let your servant go in peace,
just as you promised;
because my eyes have seen the salvation
which you have prepared for all the nations to see,
a light to enlighten the pagans
and the glory of your people Israel.'*

Anna too has the privilege of meeting the Saviour of the world in the person of the Christ-child. She too begins to praise God. But more than that, she speaks of the greatness, goodness and destiny of this baby to anyone who shows any interest.

To both Simeon and Anna, then, the Presentation has this meaning. The Christ-child is meeting his God and their God in God's own house. In turn they themselves are meeting the Christ-child, and in his company they experience relief and peace, light and life, hope and joy. In a word, their meeting with Jesus is an experience of salvation.

To all of us who come together today, to celebrate the Presentation of the Christ-child, our Feast reminds us of all that Christ has meant to us, and all that he continues to mean to us. We first came into his presence on that day we were led into the House of God and the community of God to be baptized. We have met him again many times since. For example, in the guidance and protection, the goodness and kindness, the love and support, of our parents! In the love and friendship of many other significant people in our lives! In things that have happened to us and in things we have experienced! And especially in all the sacraments that we have celebrated— such as Confirmation, Reconciliation, Eucharist, and Marriage!

It is precisely because of the length and depth of our relationship with Christ, that in this Eucharist we will praise God with words taken from the Preface of the Feast:

'... we too, go forth, rejoicing to encounter your Salvation'

Precisely too because of the length and depth of our relationship with Christ we will pray to God in words of our Prayer after Holy Communion:

'... may we, going forth to meet the Lord, obtain the gift of eternal life!'