



The Jewish Law at the time of Jesus stipulated that every first-born male child had to be dedicated or presented to God in the Temple forty days after their birth. Today, we celebrate the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple by Mary and Joseph forty days after his birth. The question naturally arises: What does this ritual mean for us? What did it mean for Mary and Joseph?

First, God instituted this ritual as a reminder of the great deliverance that was graciously and miraculously bestowed upon Israel in the event of the Passover (cf. Exodus 13). As you may recall, all the first-born of both man and beast in Egypt were struck dead by the judgment of God as a result of the Pharaoh's

enslavement of the Jews and his refusal to allow them to freely practice their religion. God protected from this curse his chosen people who faithfully celebrated the ritual of the Passover Meal as God had directed them through his prophet Moses. Thus, the practice of the Presentation of the first born, served as a reminder to God's people that they owed their freedom and their very lives to God who delivered them from bondage, saved them from death and demonstrated so forcefully his love and providential care for the people he had chosen to be his own.

Secondly, the Presentation was a ritual of purification for the mother. Mary and Joseph in order to fulfill the Law brought their gift of two turtledoves to be offered to God in sacrifice as an expression of obedience and worship of God. In making this offering, Mary was ritually purified in accordance with the Law. In the First Reading for today's Mass, the Prophet Malachi foretells the coming of the "Lord of hosts" to the temple and how his coming would bring the purification of the sons of Levi:

"Suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts, but who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner's fire, or like the fuller's lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord." (Malachi 3:1-4)

Thus, when Jesus is "presented" or consecrated to God in the temple he is present as the Sacrificial Lamb who will take away the sin of the world and "like the refiner's fire" he will "purify the sons of Levi" and make possible due worship of God.

What does all this mean for us? Every time we participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, Jesus in effect enters our temple, our church and our bodies, and the sacrifice of Christ is made present to us. This ritual is for us a reminder that we owe our freedom and our very lives to God who has delivered us from slavery and from eternal death, and he has forcefully proved his love and providential care for us. In addition, just as Mary brought her gifts to God in order to be purified, so we bring our hearts and minds as an offering to God and when offered with Jesus we are purified by God's grace and are enabled to offer due sacrifice (worship) to the Lord.

Obviously, the Feast of the Presentation of Lord which we celebrate today is overflowing with meaning and grace for those who have eyes to see. The abundance of grace which filled Mary and Joseph in offering their gifts to God along with their presentation of Jesus is, through the liturgy of the Church, made present to us today! May God purify us all and remind us of his saving sacrificial love as we celebrate this great Feast!

Your Servant in Christ,
Fr. Terry Staples



Saint Jerome Emiliani

Born: 1486

Died February 8, 1537

Patron: Orphans and abandoned children

Canonized: 1767 by Pope Clement XIII.

Jerome was born into a noble Venetian family, the son of Angelo Emiliani and Eleanor Mauroceni. At the age of 15, following his father's death, Jerome ran away from home to pursue a military career. He joined the army of the Republic of Venice and quickly rose through the ranks, eventually becoming the commander of the League of Cambrai forces at the fortress of Castelnuovo in Tuscany.

During this period, Jerome led a carefree and irreligious life, focusing on his ambitions for military honors. However, his life took a dramatic turn when he was captured by Venetian forces and imprisoned in a dungeon. Chained in his miserable prison cell, Jerome experienced a profound spiritual awakening. He began to reflect on his past actions and felt deep remorse for his careless lifestyle and neglect of his faith. In his desperation, he turned to prayer, particularly invoking the Blessed Virgin Mary. Jerome's prayers were answered in what appeared to be miraculous circumstances. He managed to escape from the dungeon, carrying his chains with him. In gratitude, he visited a church in Treviso, where he hung his chains on the wall as a symbol of his newfound freedom and commitment to God.

Following his escape, Jerome's life took a radical turn. He returned to Venice, where he oversaw his nephews' education and pursued theological studies. At the age of 37, he was ordained as a priest. In the years after his ordination, events again called Jerome to a decision and a new lifestyle. Plague and famine swept northern Italy. Jerome began caring for the sick and feeding the hungry at his own expense. While serving the sick and the poor, he soon resolved to devote himself and his property solely to others, particularly to abandoned children. He founded three orphanages, a shelter for penitent prostitutes and a hospital.

Around 1532, Jerome and two other priests established a congregation, the Clerks Regular of Somasca, dedicated to the care of orphans and the education of youth. Jerome was one of the first to teach children Christian doctrine using a question-and-answer technique, an early form of catechism. Jerome's tireless dedication to the sick and poor eventually took a toll on his health. At the age of 56, he contracted the plague while caring for the sick and died in Somasca, Italy. His selfless act of service became the final testament to his life's mission.

Reflection: Very often in our lives it seems to take some kind of "imprisonment" to free us from the shackles of our self-centeredness. When we're "caught" in some situation we don't want to be in, we come to know the liberating power of the Holy Spirit acting within us. Only then do we recognize the call to respond to God's will. All that remains is to answer that call.