

The Presentation of Our Lord

(From Conversation with God, Fernandez Carvajal)

Jesus arrives at the Temple in the arms of his mother Mary. According to the Jewish law, the first-born male had to be presented to the Lord forty days after his birth. Due to the action of the Holy Spirit in their souls, Simeon and Anna are the only people who recognize the Messiah in this ordinary infant. In today's Responsorial psalm the Church recalls how the Jewish people celebrated the entrance of the Ark of the Covenant: "O gates, lift up your heads; grow higher, ancient doors. Let him enter, the king of glory!"

There were two precepts of the ancient law concerning the birth of first-born sons. According to Leviticus, a woman who bore a child was unclean. The period of legal impurity ended, in the case of a mother of a male child, after forty days, with a rite of purification. With regard to first-born sons, it is written in the Book of Exodus: "The Lord said to Moses, Consecrate to me all the first-born; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast; is mine." This offering was a living memorial to how the Lord had delivered the people of Israel from their captivity in Egypt. Every first-born male, then, belonged to God and had to be set apart for the Lord, that is, dedicated to the service of God. However, once divine worship was reserved to the tribe of Levi, first-born who did not belong to that tribe were not dedicated to God's service, and to show that they continued to be God's special property, a rite of redemption was performed. The Law laid down that the Israelites should offer in sacrifice some lesser victim as a symbolic form of ransom.

Our Lady prepared her soul to present the Son of God to the Father and to offer herself to Him. In doing this she renewed her fiat, her be it done unto me, and once again put her whole life at the disposition of the Lord. Jesus was presented to the Father in the hands of Mary. This was a very special offering at the Temple which would never be repeated. More than thirty years later, Jesus would make the supreme offering of himself outside the city on Calvary.

Today's feast is an open invitation for us to renew our dedication to the Lord. We should offer him our entire being, our thoughts, our works, everything we are, everything we do. We can make this offering in many different ways. Today we might make our own this moving prayer of Saint Alphonsus Liguori: "Today, Oh my queen, I also, in imitation of you I wish to offer my poor heart to God. Offer me as you to the eternal Father and to Jesus, and pray him that through the merits of his Son, and by your favour, he may accept me, and take me for his own."