



The Presentation of the Lord

'The Gift of Peace.'

During this week we have following readings from the second book of Samuel, which have been telling the story of David's most shameful actions: his adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and his murderous plot to get her husband, Uriah the Hittite, out of the way. Despite being the anointed of the Lord, David was a flawed man, whose desires got the better of him and led him into mortal sin. Eventually, however, he repented and the Lord forgave him, but there was a price to pay. Eventually, we may assume, David found a new peace in turning back to the Lord.

Many of us want peace. We pray for peace in our world, we want to see an end to fighting in Iraq or Afghanistan, we want to see justice in Zimbabwe, we want stability in our world.

But for any of this to happen we have to start with the human heart, for it is here that peace ultimately to be found. And where better to start, on this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, than in our own hearts and lives?

We all want peace. We all want to be free of the anxieties that beset us. What do we tend to worry about? Making ends meet. Paying the bills. Making sure that we and our children are fed, clothed and loved and safe. We want to be free of things that might be in store in time to come. We may be worried about health, or our pension, our security. We may be worried about our children getting into the wrong company. We may be frustrated about where we are in life and where we want to be. We might be having to cope with physical pain or mental anguish. I'm sure you could add to the list if you so wished.

Some years ago, I was in S. John's Church in Dysons Road and Fr Andrew and I were desperately trying to rescue a small bird that had got trapped in the building. Of course the bird was having none of it and had no idea that we were trying to help it. When eventually we managed to get hold of it, it struggled wildly, thinking that we were the enemy. It had no idea that we were trying to help.

Peace is knowing that we are held by God. We are not in the grip of random chance, or dark forces (unless we let them). We are in the loving embrace of God and we do not need to struggle. Jesus himself tells us this in the Gospels: 'Therefore...do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body or what you will wear. And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?' (Matthew 6. 25)

And it is this peace to which Simeon refers in today's Gospel: 'Now, master, you can let your servant go in peace.'

Promised that he would not see death until he had seen the anointed of the Lord, he now holds the saviour of all things in his arms, the same child who now holds us in His, and the peace that the world cannot give, the peace that passes all understanding, is the peace that comes from him and him alone. Simeon trusted in the Lord. He trusted in His promise: he believed that he would not see death until that promise was fulfilled and, having now lived to see the fulfilment of the promise, was content to pass from this world to the next. He neither refused to live, nor was he afraid to die, for he knew himself to be in the hand of God in both life and death

It is that same peace that we share during the Mass. When we are asked to share a sign of peace, it is Christ's peace that we share, not our own.

So, today, when we come to share the peace, remember that is not an opportunity to have a chat; it is a God-given opportunity to give Christ's peace to each other, the brothers and sisters of the Lord who worship here, to look them in the eye and see in them the face of Christ.

At the end of Mass we are invited to 'Go in peace'. The peace that we have shared among us, is the same peace that we are to take into the world to be, in the words of S. Francis of Assisi, instruments of Christ's peace.

So let us pray for that gift of peace, and it is a gift. Let us pray that we can be like Simeon who put all his trust in God and who met His Son and knew his peace. We will meet the Lord in this Mass. We, too, can go in peace.