



The Holy See

FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

HOMILY OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II

Friday, 2 February 2002

1. "Lumen ad revelationem gentium" (A light for revelation to the Gentiles). The liturgy of today's feast recalls, in the first place, the words of the Prophet Malachi: "the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple... behold, he is coming." These words, in fact, come true at this moment: there enters his temple for the first time he who is its Lord. It is a question of the temple of the Old Covenant, which was the preparation for the New Covenant. God makes this New Covenant with his people in him whom "he anointed and sent into the world", that is, in his Son. The temple of the Old Covenant waits for that Anointed one, the Messiah. The reason for its existence, so to speak, is this waiting. And here he enters. Brought by the hands of Mary and Joseph. He enters as an infant, forty days old, in order to meet the requirements of Mosaic law. He is brought to the temple like so many other Israelite children: the child of poor parents. So he enters unobserved and — almost in contrast with the words of the prophet Malachi — not expected by anyone. "Deus absconditus" (the hidden God; cf. Is 45:15). Hidden in human flesh, born in a stable near the town of Bethlehem. Subject to the law of redemption, as his mother was to the law of purification. Although everything seems to indicate that here, at this moment, no one is expecting him and no one notices him, actually it is not so. The aged Simeon goes up to Mary and Joseph, takes the child in his arms, and utters the words that are a living echo of the prophecy of Isaiah: "Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation which thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to thy people Israel" (Lk 2:29-32; cf. Is 2:2-5; 25:7). These words are a synthesis of the whole expectation, a synthesis of the Old Covenant. The man who utters them, does not speak by himself. He is a prophet: he speaks from the depth of the Revelation and of the faith of Israel. He announces the fulfilment of the Old and the beginning of the New.² The light. Today the Church blesses the candles which give light. These candles are, at the same time, a symbol of the other light, the light that is Christ. He began to be light from the

moment of his birth. He was revealed as light to the eyes of Simeon on the fortieth day after his birth. Then he remained as light for thirty years in the hidden life of Nazareth. Subsequently, he began to teach, and the period of his teaching was a short one. He said: "I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (Jn 8:12). When he was crucified "there was darkness over all the land" (Mt 27:45 and sim.), but on the third day this darkness made way for the light of the resurrection. The light is with us! What does it illumine? It illumines the darkness of human souls. The darkness of existence. Man makes a perennial and immense effort to open up a way and arrive at light; the light of knowledge and existence. How many years does not man at times dedicate to clarifying some fact for himself, to finding the answer to a given question! And how much personal toil it costs each of us in order that — through everything in us that is "dark", shadowy, through our "worse self", through the man subjugated by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (cf. 1 Jn 2:16) — we can reveal what is luminous: the man of simplicity, of humility, of love, of disinterested sacrifice; the new horizons of thought, of the heart, of will, of character. "The darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining", St John writes (1 Jn 2:8). If we ask what is illumined by this light, recognized by Simeon in the Child forty days old, the answer is as follows: it is the answer of the interior experience of so many men who have decided to follow this light. It is the answer of your life, my dear Brothers and Sisters, men and women religious who take part today in the Liturgy of this feast, holding a lighted candle in your hands. It is, as it were, a foretaste of the paschal vigil when the Church, that is each of us, holding high the lighted candle, will cross the threshold of the temple, singing "Lumen Christi". It is particularly in depth that Christ illumines the mystery of man. Particularly and deeply, and with what delicacy, he descends into the secret recesses of souls and of human consciences. He is the Master of life, in the deepest sense. Yet just he, he, the only one, has revealed to each of us, and always reveals to so many men, the truth that "man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself (cf. Lk 17:33)" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24). Let us give thanks today for the light that is in the midst of us. Let us give thanks for everything that, by means of Christ, has become light in ourselves; has ceased to be "darkness and the unknown".

3. Finally, Simeon says to Mary, first with regard to her Son: "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against." Then with regard to herself: "And a sword will pierce through your own soul also, that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed" (Lk 2:34-35). This day is his feast; the feast of Jesus Christ, on the fortieth day of his life, in the temple of Jerusalem according to the provisions of the law of Moses (cf. Lk 2:22-24). And it is also her feast: Mary's. She carries the Child in her arms. He, even in her hands, is the light of our souls, the light that illumines the darkness of knowledge and of human existence, of the intellect and the heart. The thoughts of so many hearts are revealed when her mother's hands carry this great divine Light, when they bring it closer to man. Hail, you who became Mother of our light at the cost of the great sacrifice of your Son, at the cost of the motherly sacrifice of your heart!

4. And, finally, allow me, today, on the day after my return from Mexico, to thank you, O Lady of Guadalupe, for this Light which your Son is for the sons and daughters of that country and also of the whole of Latin America, The third General Conference of the Episcopate of that Continent, which began solemnly at your feet, O

Mary, in the Sanctuary of Guadalupe, has been carrying out its work in Puebla since 28 January on the subject of the evangelization of Latin America in the present and in the future. It is endeavouring to show the ways along which the light of Christ must reach the contemporary generation in that great and promising continent. Let us recommend this work in prayer, looking today at Christ carried in his Mother's arms, and listening to Simeon's words: "Lumen ad revelationem gentium".

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