

Presentation of the Lord - 2020

Mal 3:1-4; Heb 2:14-18; Luke 2:22-40 (long)

What is the nature of parental love? What lengths will a parent go through for their children? Today's feast falls 40 days after Christmas, and helps to link the meaning of Christmas more deeply into our own lives. Today is a feast reflecting on some down-to-earth realities: the love of God for his children, the love of children for God, the love of Mary and Joseph for their child - all of this can help answer the questions: "What is the nature of parental love"? and "What lengths will a parent go through for their children"?

In Christmas we see the lengths that a parent will go through for their children. We see Our God comes down from the glory of heaven and becomes a helpless baby providing the body that he would be sacrificed for us. This coming was foretold in the prophets - one of whom we heard in the first reading: *Thus says the Lord GOD: Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me* [that is, John the Baptist]; *And suddenly there will come to the temple the LORD whom you seek* [which he fulfills today]. This is the fulfillment of a great self-giving promise God has made to us. Another promise that we heard of was God's personal promise to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah. Jesus is brought into the temple and amid the craziness of the place, with all the people and noise there - Simeon is led by the spirit to a couple with a child - and he knows immediately that this is the Messiah. God fulfilled the promise to come to the people in general, and in a touching way God fulfills a promise made to the old man Simeon who must have patiently waited for many years for this to happen (as we often have to wait for a while sometimes to see God's promises fulfilled). We see here several aspects of parental love. The parent (God) being present to the people in the person of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, and also, the parents (Mary and Joseph) are doing what is right for their child before God. Acts of parental love - of self sacrifice, of honoring promises, and of fulfilling parental duties. Mary and Joseph also show themselves to be good children of the Heavenly Father by coming to the Temple, fulfilling the law, and offering their son to God and God takes this gift and will offer Jesus for all of us. A two way display of love between parent and children.

But this feast opens up for us another whole aspect of parental love. That of guiding and forming children. As any parent and child know, the relationship between parents and children is

not one continuous warm and fuzzy “love-fest.” Especially in those years when the child is young, the parent must sometimes deny children things, must correct their behavior, must instruct them with words that are uncomfortable, or must punish them. The child may think that this means that the parent does not love them. They may have the childish idea that to love means to never conflict or never to have an uncomfortable or difficult moment. But as you mature, you realize that these parental denials, corrections, and unwanted lectures are an extremely important part of the parent showing their love. To let the child do whatever they want is not love but neglect. To allow the child to eat candy and soda three meals a day and play with the electric socket if they want to is uncaringly indulgent and will result in sickness, harm, and unhappiness.

At Christmas we saw God’s coming in Jesus in all its self-sacrifice, beauty and gentleness - today God reminds us through the prophet that as a good parent, there is also the duty to deny, correct, and give unwanted lectures - the prophet says: *Yes, he is coming ... But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner’s fire ... and he will purify the sons of Levi.* Just like the fire burns off impurities in metal being refined, the pains and trials of life will be used by the Lord to burn off our impurities. Why? Because God wants us to suffer? No. Because God is a good parent and wants to give us a better existence.

Today God also reminds us that we do not go through all of this alone. While being parent God is also a brother in Jesus, and like a good big brother (who already knows the parent well), Jesus can be there beside us and guide us. We heard in the second reading: *Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.* What is the nature of parental love? What lengths will a parent go through for their children? God the loving parent comes and offers himself to redeem us, and God cares enough to do the painful work of trying to refine us, and God walks with us and supports us as we are refined. All of this is to fulfill the promises God made through the prophets - promises proclaimed by the holy Prophetess Anna (who really becomes the first prophet to proclaim Jesus for who he is).

This self-giving, this leaving of a high state to come into a poor one just for your children is a supreme act of love by the parent who also continues to love us by doing the work to purify us, and who patiently walks beside us the whole way. A parent who goes to these lengths shows the true nature of parental love.