

## ALREADY BUT NOT YET

It is a little over six weeks since Christmas. Today is the fortieth day. An important number for the people of Israel. Forty years wandering in the desert. Jesus fasted for forty days before being tempted. The Ascension taking place forty days after Jesus' Resurrection. In first century Judaism, the forty days after the birth of a male child was when that child was to be presented to the Lord and offered to the Lord for consecration. This usually happened in the local town where the family lived but it could also happen at Jerusalem in the Temple. That is what happened with Jesus.

But because it is Jesus and because we believe that He is the Holy One of God, there are passages from the Old Testament that apply to this moment. Today's first reading is one of those passages. The Prophet Malachi lived and wrote in Israel about four hundred and fifty years before Jesus. Malachi says: "And suddenly will come to the Temple, the Lord whom you seek." But wasn't the Lord already in the Temple? Yes. But the people of Israel had been unfaithful and the Lord had withdrawn his presence from them for a time. There was a promise to return. This moment when Jesus is presented at the Temple is that moment. But who knew? Old Simeon knew. The widow Anna knew. But not the Chief Priests or the Temple officials. It was similar to the shepherds who went to the child and the magi. They knew but no one else knew.

Here's the thing though: In the past when the Lord would come to the Temple spiritually He was invisible or sometimes He would come in the dark cloud that descended on the Temple and the Israelites would sense God's presence. This coming of the Lord is different. This time the Lord comes as one of us, as thoroughly human, as "flesh and blood" is how the author of Hebrews puts it. This coming is the definitive coming. This coming begins the plan of salvation and redemption that God has designed to restore creation and to renew the face of the earth.

Malachi says that this time the Lord comes as a refiner who refines gold or silver. Heating gold and silver until they became liquid, the refiner then slowly scrapes off any impurities. Then the true purity of the metal can be seen. This Holy One of God came to purify too. But in a very different way than we would expect. There is no doubt that sin and selfishness have been unleashed in our world and have brought about great destruction, caused deep wounds and broken many

hearts. How can this be fixed? Who can make up for what has happened throughout our human life on earth? Only God.

God sends his Beloved, His Son, to us. He is sent to us, precisely, to make up for the sin that we have visited upon the world. We are incapable of doing this. Only God can remedy this situation. Only God can bring forgiveness and healing. Only God can renew the face of the earth and restore our lost innocence. Jesus cannot come to the Temple on his own yet. His mother and Joseph have to bring him the first time. But Jesus will come to the Temple many times. He will teach there. At the end of his life, he will enter humbly but triumphantly into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. He will go to the Temple and cleanse it. He will overturn the money changers tables and scatter the animals. He alone can purify. He alone does purify. He alone takes it all on—all the evil, all the ugliness, all the lies and corruption. He will be lashed at his scourging with the evil of all that. He will stagger under the weight of all that as he carries his cross. He will suffer. That is what He came to do. He is the Suffering Servant. And in his suffering he will cleanse and purify. His suffering purifies and transforms and expiates and restores.

Well, what about us? The answer depends. It depends on whether we have encountered Jesus, met him, grown to know him, grown to love him and grown to believe in Him. Out of our love for him we too will accept some of suffering. Just like we do for our families and our children. Out of our love for them we accept and even take on a certain amount of suffering. What we do not always realize is that by doing so we are sharing in the very sufferings of Jesus and we are being made new and made whole.

God does not give us anything that is mediocre. God does not accept that or settle for that. God will burn away all the impurities. God burns away everything that is not about love, anything that is not love, or anything that is not open to love. What God is doing is already underway. The victory of love has already taken place. But. That victory is not yet complete. It is already but not yet. The Lord still needs us, our contribution, so we can make up what is missing in the sacrifice he has made for us. That is what this feast of the Presentation of the child Jesus in the Temple is truly about.

May the Lord bless us today and give us his peace.