

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Christmas is just a little over a month past. Can you remember any of the gifts you received? I'm sure most of us can recall one or another of the gifts we were given, with at least a moment to think about it.

This Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is deeply connected to the Feast of the Birth of Christ. Historically, in the Church, it was seen as the concluding celebration of the season of Christmas. As Christmas is the feast of the gift given, today's celebration is the feast of the gift acknowledged.

How do we respond to the gift given at Christmas? It usually depends on the type of gift it is. Some gifts call forth a small and simple, but heart-felt thank you. Some surprise us so, that a shout of delight bursts forth from us and we jump up with a big hug for the giver. Some are so thoughtful, so beautiful, that they bring tears to our eyes and demand the time and effort to write a note expressing our deeply felt gratitude for the gift.

In presenting Jesus to the Lord in the Temple, Joseph and Mary are acknowledging the gift to the giver and consecrating him to God in gratitude for the gift. God, in turn, blesses them in the revelation of Simeon and the prophecy of Anna, as to the true nature of their Son.

In this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is the very heart of the Catholic life. We as a people encounter God as the very gift of Himself made present to us in the Eucharist. For us the question becomes how do we acknowledge the gift? Do we offer the gift, as Joseph and Mary did, re-dedicating our baptismal consecration by uniting ourselves more truly to Christ in the living out of our lives? As Mary and Joseph and Jesus who "returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth", do we go home to our families, our jobs, our schools, our world, and grow in the life of wisdom that is a life lived as a gift from God given "to all who are awaiting redemption"?

My Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

When will we Catholics wake up to recognize the enormity of the gift we are given week-in and week-out—the living, breathing Eucharistic Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ Himself? God Himself has chosen us, called each of us by name, to receive this gift of Himself.

Please! I'm begging you! Please acknowledge the wondrousness of this gift by consecrating yourself anew to the work for which this gift is given, and the work is nothing less than allowing every person who crosses your path encounter the living, breathing reality of Jesus Christ in you.

The world is yearning for what we have to give. Those around you are desperate for the Christ in you. Make Jesus Christ real to them in all that you say and do. The Gospel tells us that Jesus grew. Allow Him to grow in you! Become strong in faith! You are, by virtue of the Holy Spirit dwelling in you, filled with wisdom! The favor of God is upon you.

Friends, it seems we have lost our way. We have lost our focus. To our Grandparents, their Catholic faith was their life. To our parents, it was a ritual. To our generation, our Catholic faith is, at best, a necessary obligation, at worst, a necessary evil. To our children, it will be abandoned.

That's scary, but it's also true. We can see it happening already. Former Catholics are the second fastest growing religious group in America, right behind evangelical Protestants, whose churches are growing thanks to former Catholics joining. Let's face it. There will be a whole lot more Catholics at the Super Bowl today or watching it on television than will show up in Church to receive the gift of God Himself in our Eucharistic Lord.

Again, we have lost our focus. How can we regain it. Our faith has to be consciously at the center of our lives, especially our family life. If the kid's football or soccer or music or dancing, all good pastimes, crowd out their presentation as the acknowledgement of their being God's gift to us, we are lost.

A recent study has found that the single most important factor in developing life-long, mature faith, is the simple act of families praying and worshipping together, then doing something for somebody else together. It doesn't much matter what the act is—cooking a meal, visiting a sick person, planting a garden for an elderly neighbor, shoveling a neighbor's driveway or parking spot. What matters is that children do it together with their parents. When they do, the message sticks: serving others in the name of Jesus Christ is what Christian Catholics do.

Another study indicates that no matter how faithful a mother is in the life of the church, if the father isn't involved, the children in that family are much less likely to be active in the church. This does not diminish the importance of mothers. It does say to fathers that our children are likely to do as we do, regardless of what we say. This is the fact of this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord that jumps out at us about Mary and Joseph and Jesus as a family, is that faith was at the center of their life.