



The Presentation of the Lord A February 2, 2020

- ◆ **Lessons from the Presentation of the Lord**
- ◆ **Affirming words on two of my books**

The following article by Edel McClean appeared in a 2013 issue of *Reality*, a Redemptorist magazine published in Dublin.

Over the weeks of the Christmas season, we heard repeatedly of how God invades humanity, and only a small group of people are present to recognize it. But what happens to these people as the bright lights of Christmas begin to dim, and we all return to our day-to-day lives?

In the account of the presentation of the Lord in the temple, we are given some hint of how to approach life in the ordinary. Here we have a snapshot of four people standing on the rim of a new world order doing the most ordinary of things— admiring and blessing a newly born baby, a small, seemingly insignificant group of people declaring that the hope of Israel has arrived. There was no outward sign on the baby, not choirs of angels, no thunderclaps or lightning as he entered the temple for the first time. Instead, he's a firstborn child of poor parents, coming with probably dozens of others that same day to be dedicated to the Lord, as dictated by the law. Only the knowledge placed in the hearts of Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna allows them to know that Jesus is any different to the others. What can we learn from these four figures as we journey through 2013?

Simeon's Reward

Simeon was a good man living in difficult times, filled with the Holy Spirit and 'waiting for the consolation of Israel.' Simeon dared to hold onto faith, recognizing the importance of holiness when the signs of the times whispered to let them go. That holiness, the long years of waiting, putting one foot in front of another in faith, allow him to hear the voice of God. But remember the long years of his waiting, praying and hoping. Although he meets Jesus as an infant, he won't see him as a grown man, hear his words and see his love. He tastes the promise, and for Simeon that taste is enough. This moment is the diamond, set in the gold that

God has created in Simeon through long years of ordinary holiness.

Anna's Fidelity

Anna was a prophetess, another person who heard the voice of God and declared it to others. Many would have given up, having been made a widow after seven years, and then living 84 years in faithful service, hoping for the redemption of Israel. After all these years, finally meeting Jesus, she could be forgiven for wanting to 'go in peace' like Simeon. Instead, she goes out to speak words of hope to all those who 'were looking forward to the redemption of Israel.'

Again, it is a redemption she will not see. She will never know the adult Jesus, but after many, many years of waiting and faithfulness, she has this brief mountain top experience and, again, this is enough for her. She goes out from this encounter filled with thankfulness for the child.

Anna is fundamentally ordinary. It is long years of faithfulness that have taken her to this moment and it's to her ordinary service that she returns after this moment, to sing out in thanksgiving what the Lord has shown to her.

Ordinary Parents

Mary and Joseph are essentially ordinary parents. They arrive quietly at the temple to fulfil their obligations, faithful Jews, doing what is familiar and required under the law of Moses. Even with everything that has happened to them in the previous year and the circumstances of the child's birth, they are still amazed at what Simeon has to say. They will have to hold on to this moment for many long years, through 12 years of rearing a child, before a strange happening in a temple, and then another 18 before any real indication of what this incredible child's future was to be. They allow God to speak to them, and then go on their way, doing the ordinary things—raising a child, washing him, dressing him putting him to bed in the daily work of parenthood. This child had to be served, cared for and loved like any other.

Valuing The Ordinary

For Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna, we see a highlight, a glittering moment to which years of holiness and righteousness, hoping and being faithful have brought them. *They live the ordinary and live it well. Our world is often dissatisfied with the ordinary.* We're encouraged to live life at breakneck speed with our time so valuable that we need cleaning cloths already saturated with cleaner, microwave meals ready in less than three minutes, and ever pre-washed lettuce. Everything is 'right now' and we get frustrated when we have to wait, when we're told 'not yet,' when getting something we want requires time and effort.

The immediacy of the culture we live in can lead us to devalue the ordinary. If we are always in a rush, the ordinary pleasure of watching a sunrise or hugging a friend seems less valuable. Have you ever been deep in conversation with someone when their mobile phone rings and they disappear off to answer it? It's as though the demand of the instant takes over and we forget the importance of really being in the moment.

When the ordinary becomes devalued, we become dissatisfied. We feel that our ordinary jobs are not good enough or important enough. We feel that our families with all their imperfections are a failure. We consider ourselves a disappointment for not having the right attitudes, enough get up and go, the perfect mind and the perfect body. And so, day by day, we grow more and more discontented with how things are, with the ordinariness of the lives God has given us.

Spiritual Thrill Seekers

There is also a danger that we become spiritual as well as social thrill-seekers. I know I want the quick-fix, I want to live on the mountain top, not walk through the valley. I want to be spiritually sorted without the daily discipline that I know will create that. Of course, we want the highs. We want God to speak to us dramatically as he did to Simeon and Anna, not in the still small voice that you have to be disciplined to hear.

I firmly believe that God wants to communicate with me. But I also firmly believe that God wants the kind of followers that Simeon, Anna, Mary and Joseph were. *The most faithful followers of God are found in the most ordinary of lives in the most ordinary of people—in the stay-at-home mother devoted to her children, in the person who is ill but heroically holding onto faith, in the student who puts his head down and works faithfully to do his best.* I see that real servanthood in those who do their best to live good and kind lives holding onto faith, hoping and praying that God will change the world and change them.

Perhaps what we really need is a reengagement with the ordinary. We are called to be willing to live our ordinary lives in faithfulness and commitment, just as the four people at the presentation of Jesus did. And perhaps in our spiritual lives just as in our overall lives, we have to have the patience to live in the 'not yet,' to accept the less than perfect, while still hungering for the perfect. Perhaps what the presentation of Jesus at the temple can teach us is that we can't expect to have all the answers. Simeon and Anna, Mary and Joseph could not see the future. They lived for the appreciated, the right now, the immediate joy that this child brought into the world and into their hearts.

In our Christian lives, we can't expect that everything is going to happen 'right now.' We can't expect to reach the mountain top in a second and remain there for our entire Christian lives. And we can't only look to ourselves, look inwards without recognizing the work of God in others and in the world around us. The joy at the presentation is a personal joy, yes, but also a joy for what this child means for the rest of the world—for Jew and for Gentile. The people present at the presentation had their eyes fixed on God, not themselves, and that is what brought them in their peace.

Listening

What do Mary, Joseph, Simeon and Anna have to say to our instant culture of today? They speak to us of patience, waiting, hoping and discipline. They speak of ordinary lives, faithfully lived that were used by God in the building of his kingdom. They speak of lives spent listening for the voice of God and acting on it, lives of service which were lived in the day to day.

The world we live in tells us to seek perfection, to live faster, to aim higher. It tries to persuade us to dissatisfaction with who we are and the lives we lead. Those gathered at the presentation accept that they cannot know all the answers or solutions, but that they can, through prayer and fasting, through simple discipline, and attempting, like Simeon, to be 'righteous and devout,' be used in God's service.

If we aim to seek anything in this year and every year, we aim to seek God, and recognize that through the most ordinary of lives, he can deliver the extraordinary.

[Copyright © 2013 McClean, Edel, "Lessons from the Presentation of the Lord" February 2013 issue Reality magazine, Redemptorist Communications. Used with permission.]

My Books on the Mass and Forgiveness

As most of you know, I have written three books:

- *13 Powerful Ways to Pray*
- *How to Forgive Yourself & Others* (also available in Spanish)
- *A Simple Explanation of the Mass (and the Liturgical Year)*

Kate Midden is a wonderful ambassador of books that she thinks will touch the lives of other people. When we offer a new book, Kate usually walks away with a half-dozen of them under her arm. Recently, she sent a copy of my book on the **Mass** to her brother Paul. After reading the book, Paul wrote the following.

I just finished Father Eamon's book this morning. I found it to be an excellent summary and overview of the Mass as well as a wonderful summary of the Liturgical Year. I appreciated the simple yet profound way Father Eamon brought out the deeper understanding of what is actually going on throughout the Mass and how it is all inter-connected—and how to connect it to our thoughts/actions at Mass as well as how to connect it to how we live our lives. I've seen decent summaries of 'the Mass' but not one that accomplishes all the above so simply and clearly.

How to Forgive Yourself & Others

Over the years, this is the book I have received the most positive feedback on. As we all know, forgiveness is a big issue for many people. My book gives very practical reflections and prayer suggestions on how to forgive another (living or deceased), forgive an institution, forgive self, and even forgive God, which might seem strange. But the fact is sometimes people feel very hurt and let down by God when prayers for a sick loved one or some other good cause are not answered.

In December, Kathleen sent me the follow email.

My husband and I love coming to your parish when we are in Cape Canaveral. Sometime last year I bought your book on Forgiveness. Earlier this year I bought 6 more and last month I bought 5 more for a friend to whom I had given one. The following are two concrete results from people who read your book.

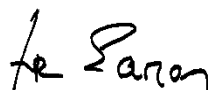
- *My husband was able to forgive his deceased father for which today would be called "abuse" that he had received.*

• *A friend's daughter, after reading it, decided the best way to forgive herself for being an alcoholic was to enter rehab. She's been sober since the first of May.*

Kathleen adds:

"I wish I could afford to buy 100 of these books. It is one of those books I wish everyone I know could and would read.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fr. Eamon". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.