



Remember me in Your Kingdom

Massachusetts, February 2, 2020

Sermon: “Presentation of Christ”

By Father Philip Raczka, PhD

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the 40th day after Christmas, and the First Sunday for the Preparation for Lent. I will talk about the Presentation of Christ because it is on Sunday only once every 7 years, whereas we hear the story of the Publican and Pharisee every year.

In the ancient Middle East, in the time of the Old Testament, the pagans had a horrible custom. If there was a bad war, or a bad disease that was killing thousands of people, or a bad famine and everyone was starving, they thought that the gods were angry with them. And the way that one would stop the gods from being angry was to sacrifice the first born sons of the people to the pagan god. In short, they killed their first born sons. The practice went on for centuries. The people did it out of ignorance, but we know that it was inspired by the devil. The devil hates human beings, and if he can get us to kill each other, he thinks that is great.

God loves human beings and does not want us to kill each other, but to love each other. God was looking for a way to get people to stop this horrible custom of killing the babies. When Abraham’s son Isaac was about 12 years old, God asked Abraham to sacrifice his son. Abraham did not want to do it, but he knew that all the people around him did it. This made him think that the true God wants this done also. Abraham took his son Isaac to Mount Moriah near Jerusalem, and was about to kill him. Then God stopped him, and there was a sheep caught in the bushes nearby, and Abraham sacrificed the lamb in place of his son. This is the beginning of the concept of the Lamb of God, a lamb that dies in place of a person. So Abraham learned that God does not want human sacrifice, and he taught that to his son Isaac.

Later on at the time of Moses, God did something to make sure that the idea of child sacrifice did not creep back into people’s minds. He told Moses to tell the people that on the 40th day after birth of the first son, they were to go to the temple, and offer a lamb or two pigeons to God in place of the son. Thus the animal was substituted for the child, and the child was free. It could never ever be sacrificed to God because God had accepted the animal in its place. In this way God made sure that the people would not fall into the terrible habit of sacrificing the first born son in times of trouble or distress.

God did declare the first born child special however, and that the child should do the special work that God had for it. That is interesting, because at that time they always thought of the first born son as doing the special work that his earthly father wanted him to do; such as to take over the farm, or the business, or the kingdom. God placed Himself before the earthly father, and told the parents that the child might have God's work to do, and that would come first. It did not always happen, in fact it happened rarely, but God did sometimes call the eldest son to be a prophet or other special work.

So, we come now to Christ. He was Mary's first and only Son. On the 40th day after his birth, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the temple to offer the sacrifice in place of Him. They offered two doves, which was the offering of the poor people. Regular people offered a lamb and a dove together. Mary and Joseph fulfilled what was required of them by the Jewish Law.

This scene points forward to the ministry of Jesus, for He would have to do the work of the Heavenly Father, not that of St. Joseph. He would not carry on the legacy and property and name of St. Joseph. Instead, Jesus had his mission from the Heavenly Father. It also points forward to Jesus being the Lamb of God. Jesus would die on the cross in place of all of us. The lamb died in place of Isaac, and at the time of Moses the Paschal Lamb died in place of the first born Hebrews, and later the offering of the two doves died in place of the first born son. Jesus died on the Cross so that we could escape sin and death, and be reconciled to our heavenly Father. This is what Christ did for us.

I want to mention briefly today that unfortunately we are once again in the age when babies are killed. They are killed in the womb to save money, and to further careers. They are killed because people are poor and afraid. Whatever the reason is, this is not from God. God loves us, and wants us to live, not die. To kill children, whether born, or in the womb is evil and abhorrent to our Heavenly Father. True Christians do not do it. Let us pray that the sin of abortion ends.