

Sermon

Saint Peter's

The Presentation of Christ in the Temple

'We proclaim Jesus Christ and him crucified'

Malachi 3.1-4, Psalm 24, Heb 2.14-18, Lk 2.22-40



A thousand years before the coming of Christ, the prophet Malachi proclaimed the coming of God into his temple. For the Jewish people, the temple was a metaphor for the world. The meaning of the prophecy is clear: God himself is coming into his world.

In the presentation of Christ in the temple, the God who created the heaven and the earth, the God to whom the earth and all that is in it belongs, who has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers, God himself is in the world in Jesus Christ, in fulfilment of the Jewish hope. For what is a temple for, but as a place for God to dwell?

If that is the presence of God, what is the activity of God? If God is with us, what is he doing among us? The answer is found, once

again, in the prophets. For what is a temple for, but as a place of sacrifice?

The Christian Church proclaims Jesus Christ, and him crucified. God's sacrifice, once, for human sin.

'But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?' says the prophet Malachi. 'For he is like a refining fire, a refiner and purifier of the people, as gold and silver is refined, and purified, until they present the offering of themselves to the Lord in righteousness. Then the offering of the people of God will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years'.

Jesus Christ, in his crucifixion, is God us, here, in God's temple, the Christian church. He himself is present in each celebration of the Holy Eucharist. He himself is active, to refine and purify his people. He himself is here to cleanse us of our sins.

Here, on this holy mountain, the Eucharist, 'the summit', we meet, not with ourselves, but with God. With God who is holy. With God who makes us holy: a holy people, set apart from a world of sin, for the worship and service of God.

In the words of the psalmist:

'Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?:
And who shall stand in his holy place?
Those who have clean hands and pure hearts:
who do not lift up their souls to what is false,
and do not swear deceitfully.
They will receive blessing from the LORD:
and vindication from the God of their salvation.
Such is the company of those who seek him:
who seek the face of God.'

The face of God is revealed, in Jesus Christ, our Lord. In Him, God is with us, to refine us, to purify us, to cleanse us, of all unrighteousness. God is with us, that we might lead lives now of righteousness, holiness, and peace. At peace with God, we are at peace with each other. We no longer walk in disobedience. We walk in the way of obedience. To the God who is a lamp to our feet, and a light to our path.

In the epistle we read that 'By his death he has destroyed the power of the one who has the power of death, the devil, and set free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. Because he himself was tested by what he suffered, he is able to help us who are being tested'.

Therefore, the psalmist exhorts us to lift up our heads, beyond ourselves, to the Lord:

'Lift up your heads, O you gates!
and be lifted up, O ancient doors:
that the King of glory may come in.

Who is the King of glory?:

The Lord, strong and mighty,
The Lord, mighty in battle.
The Lord of hosts,
he is the king of glory'.

In holy Eucharist we encounter Jesus Christ, and him crucified: God's sacrifice, once, for our sins.

And so we say with the prophet Simeon:

'Now, Lord, you let your servant depart in peace.
Your Word has been fulfilled.
My own eyes have seen the salvation.
Which you have prepared in the sight of the nations.

A light to reveal you to the nations.

And the glory of your people Israel...

This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed-- and a sword will pierce your own soul too."