

The Presentation of our Lord ¹

St. Peter Julian Eymard to the Servants of the Blessed Sacrament
Paris, Monday, February 2, 1863

I have brought you my candle, as a blessing for the house. I'm sure this is mine, since I placed a pin on it to identify it and not be mistaken, since I blessed them all.

The blessing of candles is done with beautiful prayers that you can find in your prayer books. People of faith light candles with great devotion during storms, disasters, and on the occasion of death. In our town, a candle is placed in the hands of one who has died. It is the light of faith and charity. It represents Jesus Christ, as sung in the liturgy. It is the work of bees, the fruit of flowers, drawn from nature's greatest beauty and fragrance. **This candle is the symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Take care of it, not for your death, since you are so few for adoration. But when you are many, the Good Lord will take some of you, since he needs some in heaven. To be on fire during our lifetime is better. The Feast of Candlemas gets its name from the candle.

The Presentation of our Lord and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin **is a great feast both in heaven and on earth.** Heaven has never received so great a victim as our Lord offered by the hands of his mother. And earth has never possessed so great a gift as this fruit of the earth, the flower of Jesse (cf. Is 11:1), the fruit of the virginity of Mary. The earth was so rich that the angels in heaven could never equal a gift in any way comparable to that offered by Mary.

It was foretold that the glory of the second Temple would excel that of the first. **The first Temple**, built by Solomon, had been destroyed by war during the (Babylonian) Captivity. Upon his return, Zerubbabel rebuilt the Temple with the help of Esdras. Although magnificent, the Temple of Zerubbabel did not equal Solomon's, which was considered a marvel of the world. When the Jews returned from Captivity and saw **this second Temple**, they began to weep, since it was so poor compared to the beautiful Temple they had seen, all covered with gold. But a prophet came to say: *The Temple that you seem to despise will enjoy greater glory than the first, because it will welcome the conquering Lamb, the Messiah* (cf. Hag 2:1-9).

In fact, this Temple became greater upon welcoming our Lord on the day of his presentation (cf. Lk 2:22-38). Nothing was lacking to honor heaven, in the person of Jesus Christ surrounded by all that was great and holy on earth. The old man Simeon was there as the most upright man who had been promised to see the Messiah before dying. Coming on the occasion inspired by the Holy Spirit, he took our Lord in his arms. Enlightened by the Lord, he became a prophet, besides being a priest and upright man. A woman came, the prophetess Anna, also inspired by the Holy Spirit; she burst into joy. Her words are not recorded, only those of Simeon who was a man of authority, being a priest, and high priest, in fact, while Anna was a simple woman who was not allowed to speak in the Temple; yet she spoke from the abundance of her love. Then, of course, there was the Blessed Virgin, the immaculate mother of the Lord, and St. Joseph. Everything combined to glorify the presentation of our Lord. Nothing is mentioned about heaven. Since the infant Jesus does not speak, neither does the heavenly Father, waiting for a more important occasion, satisfied here with receiving the homage of his heart.

What is the basic message of this feast? Here it is. Our Lord is offering himself completely to his Father for the redemption of the world and for his greater glory on earth. The infant Jesus offers himself to live in the midst of work and poverty, hidden for thirty years, followed by his public life and finally his

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sacrifice on Calvary. Our Lord's entire life unfolds before his Father who accepts it for his glory and out of love for us. Our Lord placed no conditions on his gift. Neither did the Blessed Virgin. In this offering, our Lord is the model for a religious person seeking perfection, desiring to honor, love, and serve him.

The self-offering of a Christian to God is often done to fulfill the law. The servant, on the road to heaven, finds that the way is long, with his members in constant conflict with the law, a confrontation between what is mine and what is yours. God does not require more, they are not children, considering their service an obligation. Others give more by offering their piety. This gift is greater than those who preserve their state of freedom. By giving God everything they have, they are offering more than the others. They are serving God out of filial love. These are the upright souls in the world who add counsels to the requirements of law. Thank God, they exist in the world, and are easily recognized. Some bypass marriage to serve God as virgins in the world; they are represented by the most Blessed Virgin. Others are bound by the bonds of marriage, giving all their free time, everything they can. They also gain merits, although they do not carry a lily, they offer the flowers of Calvary with greater suffering. Others find greater calm, giving all they can in the service of the Lamb.

These souls are great, forming the court of our Lord in the world. Oftentimes, however, they take back or set limitations on their gift. A virgin soul is exposed to many dangers, if she has not given everything to our Lord, she may start looking at the confusion around her. How many virgins had started well, who ended up by even losing their crown!

There are many like that in marriage! Because they are restricted, they are unhappy, having kept their freedom and their rights. They are told that they are attempting too much, that they have enough with their duties of state, and they abandon everything. Sadly enough, this advice sometimes comes from priests. These souls are weakened by a misplaced love of neighbor that makes them lose their love of God. They end up in darkness without light. They must be very faithful to preserve the light. If they are, then the Good Lord will send them an angel to guide them.

My Sisters, the Good Lord has offered you a great grace. You could have become like so many others who weakened and failed when faced with danger. They were frightened and changed their mind. There are some people in the world who feel they have a mission to prevent souls from remaining in their vocation. These are pious souls who use piety to snatch from our Lord souls who want to belong totally to him. Many pious women are working for Satan, removing from our Lord those who desire to be completely for him – lightning bolts await them on the last day! A prince who has chosen to marry a certain woman will certainly be irritated by those who have taken her away. You don't see this as we do; we see this every day. When a young man wants to remain pure, no one dares prevent him. He must stand with sword in hand. If a woman tempts him, she would be considered impudent. But for a virgin, how sad to see her being persuaded by beautifully tempting words! That's enough about those people.

There is a third group of people who give themselves to the Good Lord in religious life. This is really the presentation of our Lord. **Religious life is the gift of all that we are:** our mind to think only of him; our heart to love only him with the love of a virgin; our body to become a victim. This is truly the Presentation. Surely, some people have done this in the world, but in religious life one gives everything. In the world people keep their freedom, while here surrender of freedom is the soul of the gift. One remains on the edge of the cliff when keeping the right to take back or overindulge. In religious life we have sacrificed not only our possessions, but also our very selves. What is it we are to do here? We give ourselves totally by vow, and we dare not take anything back without being considered dishonest and misled. Those who have made vows have made the perfect gift, while the others are preparing to do so by making the gift of virtue and love. How fortunate we are.

[...]

Many persons in the world aspire to the religious life! God will remember their good will, even if they do not enter. I will not examine the reasons why God does not fulfill their desires. This is his will. While God seems very strict for people in the world, notice how good he has been for us. Not only has he accepted our gift, but he has desired, requested, and even begged this gift from us, thereby committing himself. When I give myself totally, he owes me a response, because **religious life is the royal wedding of the Lamb** (cf. Rev. 19:7). We can say that the time of novitiate is the engagement, while profession is marriage itself. You are sure of being accepted, your gift will be well received; as soon as you entered his palace, he himself led you by his angels. When Isaac first saw Rebekah, whom Eliezer (Gn. 15:2) had brought from a great distance, and when Rebekah herself saw Isaac, she covered herself with her veil, a ceremonial gesture of respect for the engaged, while Isaac kept his distance, another gesture of respect (cf. Gn. 24:62-66).

Our Lord called you and prepared you. What an honor for the novices to be called his engaged, and for the professed, his spouses! [...]. To form you, our Lord does not need a servant (Eliezer), or angels and saints. He alone will be in charge of forming you to live for his Eucharistic service. Under the same roof, living a Eucharistic life, your goal is found entirely in our Lord for whom you work. What more do you want? While the preparations for marriage may be done by others, the marriage union exists only between two persons, and no one has the right to intrude in your inner relationships. No one is to know; not even yourself. Religious life can prepare and perfect you, but your Eucharistic gift is your own joy!

My good Sisters, oftentimes in my talks there is something lacking. Do you know where your strength lies? Each member, each person finds strength in something; and the soul finds it in a grace. For example, the strength of each animal becomes frightening when used powerfully: the horns of a bull or rhinoceros seem useless, but they are its strength. For others, it is their teeth, like those of a lion. Likewise, each soul has its strength in its natural gifts, each saint has a grace that summarizes all others. **Your strength must be in your gift**, since it is your crown. It must always be perfect, not for your enjoyment, but to gather more strength. It must be maintained in all its purity.

Our Lord said: I accept your heart and give you my own, on condition that you keep the fire of your love burning, that it be ever beautiful and pure before me (cf. Lv 6:6); I accept the ownership, but you must take care of it. Your reward will be a hundredfold (cf. Mk 10:30). **What should we do?** If we do not feed it, if we do not supply it with oil (cf. Mt 25:1-13), it will remain fetid. Nourish your gift; in fact, everything we tell you is for this purpose. You can never destroy or annihilate this gift. Yet, despite the fact that your will is bound by chains of love, you remain free. You cannot misuse this freedom without committing a sacrilege. This is your virtue and your glory: I belong to you, as you belong to me (cf. Song 2:16). Be careful lest something arises to diminish your gift, drawing your heart to earthly things, spilling out the precious liquor in your vase. A betrothed has given herself by promise, while a spouse no longer belongs to herself.

My Sisters, take great care of your gift. Our Lord never reneged on his, as recorded by the prophet: *Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not; but you have given me a body to do your will* (cf. Ps 39:7-9). As our Lord has spoken, so must you do. He made you completely as you are, so that you can be totally his.

Note well that it is through the hands of Mary that our Lord wants to be offered. St. Joseph has no role in the mystery of the Presentation of our Lord, except to accompany Mary. He is not the one who offers our Lord, the Holy Spirit is always true in his goodness and truth. The Blessed Virgin carries the infant Jesus, who belongs to her. What will she do? She will present him to God, the priest is only the minister. She knew full well that he was the Messiah, since the angels had told her. But there was something that she did not know, hidden by God who wanted to allow her the joy of her divine maternity for forty days, as the Church says. She had forty days to enjoy her motherhood, alone with her divine Son. When she

finally offers the infant Jesus, keep in mind that she is also offering to follow him in all his crosses and trials. Love feeds only on trials and sacrifices. The most Blessed Virgin had to accept all possible sacrifices, and she did so in fact.

Imagine the Blessed Virgin holding the infant Jesus, offering him to the Eternal Father. There had never been a sacrifice like this. How happy she must have been with her beautiful burden! The infant Jesus would never find priestly hands as pure as those of his mother.

On the scene comes a prophet, the old man Simeon. What will he say? The Blessed Virgin offers herself to all possible sacrifices, since there is no love without suffering. She is ready to suffer with her divine Son whatever the Heavenly Father wishes. Yet, she is taken aback that the Father had only been waiting for this moment to be freed from the delicacy of his love. Simeon says: *This child is destined to be the downfall and the rise of many in Israel...a sword of sorrow shall pierce your heart* (cf. Lk 2:34-35). He does not say *your soul*, but *your heart*, since it is more sensitive. How cruel was this old man Simeon to tell such a thing to a mother! He had just praised God with the words: *Now, Master, you can dismiss your servant in peace... for my eyes have seen a revealing light to the Gentiles, the glory of your people Israel* (cf. Lk 2:29-32). How could he now bring sorrow to the mother of this child? People would say that he is cruel! She had given birth only forty days earlier, and has already suffered from the cold, etc. Why not leave her thirty years of happiness, allow her to enjoy the hidden life of Nazareth? Wouldn't it be sufficient to tell her only three days ahead of time, or at the most three years, about the revelations in chapter fifty-three² of Isaiah! One does not speak about such things to a mother, especially the Good Lord.

[...]

The world complains: The Good Lord does not love me. That is the refrain of a lazy person. If he did not love you, he would not give you what will obtain a crown for you in heaven; people want only happiness in their love for the Good Lord. Well then, go among the pagans [...] this is not our way. Let your gift of self pass through the hands of the Blessed Virgin, realizing that it is the mother who chooses a spouse for her Son – she has the eye and heart of a mother. You will also realize that, since our Lord wants to have spouses to sing a hymn on Mount Zion (cf. Rev 14:1-3), his mother called you and prepared you for this. Hence, it is through her that you should present, offer, and nourish your gift if you are professed. The infant Jesus did not want to offer himself through any other hands than those of his mother.

Foster, therefore, a tender devotion to the Blessed Virgin. You can never love her as much as she deserves. Although you are told that the Blessed Sacrament should absorb your whole life, you must not believe that you should not love the Blessed Virgin. Must we separate her from her divine Son? She accompanied him to the Temple and to Calvary. Thereafter, she suffered even more, since a sword pierced her heart, and it could no longer pierce the heart of our Lord.

What will be the fruit? When you came, you asked to be a good servant of our Lord. You did not dare say, I want to be his spouse. The Blessed Virgin will present you to our Lord as his worthy servant. A servant follows her master wherever he goes, eating what is leftover – yet, how beautiful! You will go with them to Nazareth, and eventually to Calvary, never abandoning them. If you love much, you will suffer much; if you love little, you will suffer little. Your gift through Mary's hands means to suffer out of love. Unfortunately, some place themselves in suffering, focusing on the thorns before seeing the tree. Begin by the desire to give yourselves and be accepted; later, to share the sufferings he will send.

² The reference to chapter *thirty-two* in the copy has been replaced with *fifty-three* as appears in the instruction of February 2, 1864.

You give your heart, as a life-giving field that needs to be ploughed and harrowed to receive the grain of wheat. Without that preparation the seed will not penetrate the soil. You give your heart as a living field, a land full of love that the Lord harrows with his cross. It needs to be cultivated and cleared of weeds, [...]. The process is painful, tearing out whatever blocks our Lord's entrance. This is why our Lord works on this field with the instruments of his passion, his cross. Often, there are hard clumps formed by feelings of devotion that lead to a bit of self-love; with determination we must destroy these pests. Our Lord ploughs the heart that was hardening, since his royal way was being obstructed, our Lord will pass with his thorns, he must pass.

The Presentation of our Lord is a major religious feast. I believe that you have given yourselves, and renewed your vows. What is our Lord's request? He wants us to tell him as he said: I have given you everything, and no longer belong to myself. This is what we must do, what we must say. It is your joy.

Point for Reflection:

This meditation includes two levels of prayer. Composition of place, and a search for the deeper meaning of this feast. What is the most striking for you?