

HOMILY ON THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD
IN THE TEMPLE 02/02/2020

As St. Luke the Evangelist writes, we see the righteous Symeon, who was advanced in age and had only one hope in his heart. The Holy Spirit had revealed to him early on in his life, that he would not die before seeing the Messiah. Time was passing, and yet St. Symeon never doubted that this profound desire of his would be fulfilled. And the blessed moment came, when the Holy Mother Mary, St. Joseph and the Holy Infant (just forty days old) arrived at the Temple in Jerusalem, where the baby Jesus was to be dedicated to God according to the Law (Luke 2:23-24). When the venerable Symeon saw the Holy Mother with our forty-day old Lord in her arms entering the Temple, the Holy Spirit told him that this is the One he has been waiting for. With this message he rushed forward, took Jesus to his chest and gave glory to God: “ *Lord, now, You are letting Your servant depart in peace, according to Your word; for my eyes have seen the Savior*” (see Luke 2: 29-30). He finally was granted the deepest wish of his heart, and he felt such a blessing and fulfillment in his soul. He needed nothing else, and could depart this life in peace and thanksgiving. The joy of this moment was indescribable. For Symeon, it was enough to just see the infant Lord and touch Him. The righteous elder would hear none of Jesus’ teachings, nor would he witness any of the great miracles that were to come. And yet, this moment was everything to him.

Have we as Orthodox Christians ever considered how much better our position is, compared to St. Symeon? He was only able to see Jesus as an infant, and nothing more. We have been given the blessing to get to know Jesus as perfect God and perfect man. We know through the Holy Gospels all that He has done for us. We have not only seen Jesus and touched Him, but we are united with Him through Holy Baptism! “*As many of you as were baptized into Christ, have put on Christ*” (Galatians 3:27). We are naturally united with Him in His Body as members of the Church (see 1 Corinthians 6:15). This absolute union, as the Lord Himself has confirmed, is completed by receiving His Sacred Body and Blood in Holy Communion (see John 6:56). We Orthodox know all of this. We hear and read about this, and yet the real question remains: Do we remember them always? Are we living and experiencing these teachings daily in our lives and in our spiritual struggle?

-**When I am tempted**, do I remain aware of the fact that Christ my God is with me? If the answer is yes, then I will say as the Righteous Joseph did: “*How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*” (Genesis 39:9). This way, I will protect myself from sin.

-**When everyone abandons me**, can I feel alone if I am experiencing the benevolent presence of my living Lord?

-**When I find myself in need and lacking essentials**, can I be depressed when I have faith that Christ is indeed with me (Who with five loaves of bread fed more than five thousand people)?

-**When I am in danger**, can I be in a state of panic? Or will I instead pray with the Psalmist: “*whatever kind of dangers do I face, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me*” (Psalms 22[23]:4).

When we feel the living presence of Christ in our soul, we can face all problems of life in the peace and joy of Christ. This is the natural state of our soul: **joy and delight**. Christ did not say that we would only be joyful when we leave this life and go to Paradise. No! Christ offers us His joy and peace for this life as well, and He gives it to us with Holy Communion. This is why at the end of the Divine Liturgy, in front of the table of the Holy Prothesis (where the Holy Gifts are prepared) we pray: “Christ our God ... fill always our hearts with joy and delight ...”. Christ is listening to us and offers to us, truly, joy. He even promised to us that no one shall ever be able to take away the joy that He has given to us (see John 16:22).

Our Holy Church considers all these things as gifts for the truly faithful. That is why, every day, at the end of the Vespers service, as well as at the end of the Divine Liturgy, after the Eucharistic prayers of the holy Communion, through which our union with Christ has been rejuvenated, we are repeating, with joy and delight, the prayer of the righteous Symeon: *“Lord, now, let Your servant depart ... for my eyes have seen your salvation ...”*

My brothers and sisters, a Christian that does not feel fulfillment and joy from this union with the faithful in Christ is in trouble. The Christian who has this void in their soul is not connected with Our Lord, and has lost communion with Him. What is needed is the effort to return to Christ. That is why the Church encourages, with the hymns of this Feast day, to “Let us also meet with Christ and welcome the One whom Symeon saw as Savior and as Light of the nations” (see 3rd Vespers Sticheron).