The Encounter


Philosophers of religion would describe such a meeting as mysterium tremendum et fascinans; it would be a strange and puzzling experience, drawing us toward itself but also pushing us away. In simpler terms, it would be a fascinating and terrifying encounter at the same time.

Today we celebrate the Presentation of the Lord, also known as the Purification of Mary. In Eastern Churches this is known as “The Meeting.” Forty days after the birth of Jesus, Joseph and Mary fulfill the Law of Moses by bringing their firstborn Son to the Temple of Jerusalem as an act of consecration to the Lord (cf. Ex 13:2), the source of all life and giver of all gifts. Mary also undergoes ritual purification. The Jews believe that, because of the bleeding, a mother is ritually unclean after giving birth (Lv 12:2, 6). At the time of the purification, the mother offers a year-old lamb or a pair of pigeons or turtledoves.

But “The Meeting” is not merely a family get-together and satisfaction of a religious duty on the part of Mary and Joseph. For the righteous, devout, and Spirit-filled Simeon who recites his Nunc dimittis and the prophetess Anna who gives testimony to those around, there is more to what meets the eye. In “The Meeting,” youth and old age meet, promise and fulfillment kiss, the Old and New Testaments merge. The new Temple of God enters, hallows, and purifies the ancient temple (First Reading). Consequently, divine light, glory, and salvation shine forth from Israel to all peoples (Responsorial Psalm).

Christian faith is a real, concrete, and personal encounter with God, a God who, in Jesus, became like us in every way except sin (Second Reading). God is always first; he seeks us and makes his way to find us. He lavishes us with manifold ways and means to meet him—in nature, in Scriptures, in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, in our conscience, in all the events of our daily lives, and in all people of goodwill. Perhaps it is not really asking how, when, and where we can find God; rather, it is how we allow ourselves to be found and to be transformed by him.

The constant challenge is not to fear or fret over the encounter with God. It is to look forward to it actively and patiently, with a sense of wonder and gratitude for his everyday miracles. When the decisive moment comes, as many spiritual writers say, fear, shame, and insecurity vanish. At that time, we will marvel at the truth that God simply is a bundle of joy, peace, and light.

— Fr. Angelo Paolo O. Asper, SSP

The restoration of unity among all Christians was a central concern of the Second Vatican Council; this is expressed in the Latin title of the document on Ecumenism [Unitatis Redintegratio = restoration of unity] (UR). In addition, this key concern is fostered through concrete guidelines that help Catholics work for Christian unity.

Unitatis Redintegratio takes its point of departure from the already existing ecumenical movement underway in various Christian communities (UR 1). It encourages Catholics to join this movement, offering some general principles (chapter one), some practical suggestions (chapter two), and additional reflections on those Christian communities separated from the Catholic Church (chapter three).

Chapter One begins with Christ’s prayer that all believers may be one as he and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). It envisions the Holy Spirit holding together all the faithful in union with Christ. Indeed, the source and model of unity is the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Ur follows a clear method: it encourages openness and dialogue with others, while at the same time, clearly expressing the Catholic Church’s own self-understanding, her teaching and theology, always seeking clarity and balance as an effective path to Christian unity.
PART I: BLESSING OF CANDLES AND PROCESION

1. At an appropriate hour, a gathering takes place at a smaller church or other suitable place other than inside the church to which the procession will go. The faithful hold in their hands unlighted candles. The priest and his ministers wear white vestments. The priest may wear the cope instead of the chasuble during the procession. The candles are then lit. Whenever a procession from outside cannot take place, refer to the second form of the Solemn Entrance in the Roman Missal.

2. The sign of the cross is made here.

P — Dear brethren (brothers and sisters), forty days have passed since we celebrated the joyful feast of the Nativity of the Lord. Today is the blessed day when Jesus was presented in the Temple by Mary and Joseph. Outwardly, he was fulfilling the Law, but in reality, he was coming to meet his believing people. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, Simeon and Anna came to the Temple. Enlightened by the same Spirit, they recognized the Lord and confessed him with exultation. So let us also, gathered together by the Holy Spirit, proceed to the house of God to encounter Christ. There we shall find him and recognize him in the breaking of the bread, until he comes again, revealed in glory.

Blessing of Candles

P — Let us pray. 
O God, true light, who created light eternal, spreading it far and wide, pour, we pray, into the hearts of the faithful the brilliance of perpetual light, so that all who are brightened in your holy temple by the splendor of these candles may happily reach the light of your glory. Through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

(The priest sprinkles with holy water the candles in silence. He then takes the candle prepared for him, and the procession begins with the acclamation.)

P — Let us go in peace to meet the Lord.
All — In the name of Christ. Amen.

Procession
(While the presider, the ministers, and the congregation enter the church, the entrance chant of the Mass is sung. When the priest reaches the altar, he venerates it. Then he goes to the chair and replaces the cope with the chasuble. The Mass begins with the Gloria.)

PART II: MASS

Gloria
All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King. O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Almighty ever-living God, we humbly implore your majesty that, just as your Only Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so, by your grace, we may be presented to you with minds made pure.

Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Mal 3:1-4] (SII)

The prophet Malachi proclaims the day when the Lord will come to the temple. A messenger will be sent to prepare the people for their meeting with the Lord.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

THUS SAYS the Lord God: Lo, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek, and the messenger of the covenant whom you desire. Yes, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who will endure the day of his coming? And who can stand when he appears? For he is like the refiner’s fire, or like the fuller’s lye. He will sit refining and purifying silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi, refining them like gold or like silver that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord. Then the sacrifice of Judah and Jerusalem will please the Lord, as in the days of old, as in years gone by.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 24)

R — Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord!

P — C
P — G F C

Who is this king of glory?

1. Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals; that the king of glory may come in! (R)

2. Who is this king of glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle. (R)

3. Lift up, O gates, your lintels; reach up, you ancient portals; that the king of glory may come in! (R)

4. Who is this king of glory? The Lord of hosts; he is the king of glory. (R)

Second Reading (Heb 2:14-18)

In Jesus Christ, the Lord comes to us in human form, like us in every way, that he may become our merciful intercessor before God.
A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

SINCE THE CHILDREN share in blood and flesh, Jesus likewise shared in them, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the Devil, and free those who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life. Surely he did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; therefore, he had to become like his brothers and sisters in every way, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because he himself was tested through what he suffered, he is able to help those who are being tested.

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Alleluia [Lk 2:32] (Stand)

All—Alleluia, alleluia. A light of revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel [Lk 2:22-32] (Short Form)
P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke
All — Glory to you, Lord.

WHEN THE DAYS were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, just as it is written in the law of the Lord, Every male that opens the womb shall be consecrated to the Lord, and to offer the sacrifice of a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons, in accordance with the dictate in the law of the Lord.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. This man was righteous and devout, awaiting the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying: “Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.
All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow, up to and including and became man, all bow.)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man.

For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — Christ shines as the light of salvation to all nations and the glory of his people. Let us bring our prayers to the Father who gave up his only Son for us, as we say:

R — Listen your people, Lord.

C — That the Church may show to the world the true face of Christ and be a sign of salvation to all, we pray: (R)

C — That those in authority may render selfless service to society, have the courage to speak and act in the name of truth and justice, and bear witness to the love of Christ, we pray: (R)

C — That we may be inspired by the obedience of Our Lady and St. Joseph to always observe the precepts of the Church, we pray: (R)

C — That we may always be strengthened by your Son’s example of perseverance amidst the different trials and challenges in life, we pray: (R)

C — That all those who have gone before us may be welcomed in the company of the angels and the saints who eternally sing the praise of God, we pray: (R)

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause). We pray: (R)

P — Almighty God, Christ your Son became man that he might lead us to you. As we celebrate his presentation to you, we offer our humble petitions and ask him to bring us to your presence.

We ask this through Christ, our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Presentation of the Gifts
(Stand)
P — Pray, brethren...
All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name,
for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — May the offering made with exultation by your Church be pleasing to you, O Lord, we pray, for you willed that your Only Begotten Son be offered to you for the life of the world as the Lamb without blemish. Who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

Preface: The Mystery of the Presentation of the Lord

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God.

For your co-eternal Son was presented on this day in the Temple and revealed by the Spirit as the glory of Israel and Light of the nations.

And so, we, too, go forth, rejoicing to encounter your Salvation, and with the Angels and Saints praise you, as without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)
All — We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer
All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace
Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
(Lk 2:30-31)
My eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
By these holy gifts which we have received, O Lord, bring your grace to perfection within us, and, as you fulfilled Simeon’s expectation that he would not see death until he had been privileged to welcome the Christ, so may we, going forth to meet the Lord, obtain the gift of eternal life.
Through Christ our Lord
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing
P — Bow for the blessing. (Pause)
May almighty God bless you in his kindness and pour out saving wisdom upon you.
All — Amen.
P — May he nourish you always with the teachings of the faith and make you persevere in holy deeds.
All — Amen.
P — May he turn your steps towards himself and show you the path of charity and peace.
All — Amen.
P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (†) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal
P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.