

27th December 2020 – Christmas +1 – Chris's Sermon

Luke 2:22-35 (Simeon)

In our Gospel today, we're drawn into the story of Simeon, who was called by the Spirit into the temple, to meet the baby Jesus. Simeon is described as a righteous and devout man, who dedicates his whole life to waiting for the Messiah. In Simeon, I think we see a man of great faith and patience. In the words of our reading:

'...there was a man in Jerusalem named Simeon, righteous and devout... It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah...'

In a way, I think the example of Simeon reminds us that our work in service to God continues over the course of a lifetime. It also reminds us that this ministry is demanding and sacrificial. It's only in advanced old age that Simeon ends his time of waiting and finally meets the Messiah – the baby Jesus. According to our reading, when Simeon meets Jesus, in fulfilment of his life's work, he takes the baby in his arms and offers his praise to God.

I can imagine this moment – a time of great satisfaction and relief – to see with his own eyes the Messiah for whom he had waited and waited and waited. In that moment, we see a lifetime of searching and service rewarded and blessed.

I think we too experience similar moments in our lives – moments of great spiritual fulfilment and recognition, though perhaps not as often as we would like.

When I think of Simeon in the temple, I'm reminded of the birth of my children – becoming a father – the experience of meeting my children and holding them in my arms, after so much waiting and anticipation. I can remember experiencing some really profound moments of recognition – sensing a rightness in the connection – experiencing a sense of fulfilment (I was born to be a father). At the same time, I can also remember being aware of the responsibility – aware that my life didn't just belong to me – knowing that it would now belong to my children as well – my family. I knew, looking at my children, that my life would never be the same again. So, there was joy and fulfilment and awe and concern.

I think I experienced something similar on my wedding day, when Annette and I were married. Again, there was a sense of rightness – a sense of fulfilment (and connection).

When I was ordained as a priest, again, the same sense of fulfilment – and connection. (There was also quite a bit of fear and trembling as well...)

Yes, I think the example of Simeon has much to teach – it encourages us to hold onto our faith and remain attentive to our calling, whatever that may be (to fight the good fight, to finish the race and keep the faith).

I imagine there must have been moments of doubt for Simeon over the years – times of uncertainty and perhaps even despair. Simeon was the first of God’s heralds – he pre-dates John the Baptist. (He has a very important ministry. And, everything that Simeon did in his long life led him to that moment.)

When we look at this reading, we often focus on Simeon’s recognition of the Messiah – his awareness of God – and God’s unfolding plan, which came to Simeon through a lifetime of searching.

But, at a different level, I find myself greatly moved by Simeon’s patient and consistent dedication to his calling. Simeon is constant and ready to serve, even after long years of searching. (He is an example to those of us who strive to remain faithful – to be consistent.)

The faith of Simeon reflects a degree of spiritual maturity that is nothing short of spectacular – a spiritual maturity that is very difficult to maintain. All too often, we seek to answer God’s call on our own terms – on our own time – in our own way.

However, as our reading seems to suggest, we are called to surrender ourselves and our lives, in response to God. And, we’re reminded that God’s will unfolds in God’s time – according to God’s plan.

Unlike so many of his contemporaries – the scribes and the Pharisees – the pillars of Judaism – Simeon surrenders his life in total humility and service. He completes his life’s work in the temple, in accordance with God’s will, in God’s time.

I can think of some others who might make the same claim, though I think the list would be short. Mother Teresa, offering food and shelter to the poor living on the streets of Calcutta – Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela – these are people who seem to hold a constant and steadfast faith – people who are willing to surrender the long years of their lives in service to God’s will.

As we meditate and reflect on the great faith of Simeon, I pray that we too will come to know the satisfaction of fulfilment, as we see God’s will reflected in the ministry that we offer. Yes, Simeon is truly a remarkable man of faith – an example to us all.

The Lord be with you.