

Prayers can bring blessings to all

By Father Albert Shamon
Courier columnist

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Luke 2:22-40; (R1) Malachi 3:1-4; (R2) Hebrews 2:14-18.

The Feast of the Presentation preempts the Fourth Sunday of the Year.

The Mosaic law required that a mother be purified 40 days after the birth of a boy. The purification involved her going to the temple and offering a lamb and a dove; or, if she was poor, two doves (Lev. 12:2-8). Mary and Joseph made the offering of the poor.

The law also required that the first-born son be presented to the Lord and redeemed by paying five shekels to a member of a priestly family (Ex. 13:2, 12; Num. 3:47-48). (First born, incidentally, refers to the preferential status of the eldest son; it does not imply that there was a second-born or other children.)

These laws, of course, did not apply to Jesus and Mary. Yet they submitted to them to offer to God the sacrifice of obedience and to their neighbor the power of good example.

Too many people today try to set

up conditions of exemption for themselves. On their own, many dispense themselves from the Sunday rest; from the church's prohibition of artificial contraception; from sending their children to Catholic schools; from fasting, and so on. These people are referred to as "cafeteria" or "eclectic" Catholics because they pick and choose what church teachings they will follow. That's so unlike Jesus and Mary.

During the incident in the temple, Luke underscores the presentation of the Child Jesus, rather than Mary's purification. Luke was interested in bringing out the significance of Jesus' birth.

Luke, as you know, was not a Jew. He was a disciple of St. Paul and Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles. Thus the universality of salvation is one of the features of Luke's Gospel. In his infancy narratives, Luke wished to bring out the significance of Jesus' birth: he came to save all peoples, not just the Jews.

Another law of Moses states that, "A judicial fact shall be established only on the testimony of two or three witnesses" (Dt. 19:15). This was one of the reasons why Jesus sent the apostles out two-by-two.

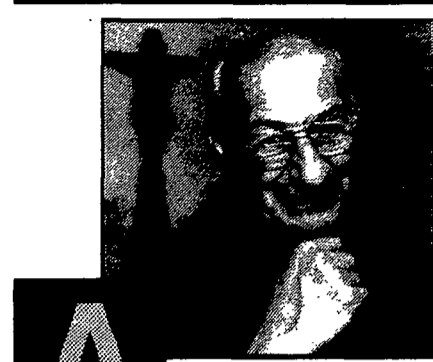
At the annunciation, Gabriel had attested that Jesus would "rule over the house of Jacob forever" (1:33). At the birth of Jesus, the angel announced "a savior has been born for you who is Messiah and Lord (2:11). Thus Luke has two heavenly witnesses declare that Jesus was born to save all people.

In the presentation of Jesus, Luke has two earthly witnesses confirm that attestation of the angels.

The first witness was Simeon. Inspired by the Spirit, he came to the temple, saw Mary with the Child Jesus, took him in his arms, and blessed God, saying that this child would be a light to end the darkness of sin and error, and would be the glory of Israel by bringing the light of truth to the Gentiles.

The second witness was Anna. First, she thanked God and then she evangelized her fellow Jews.

Together, Jesus, Simeon and Anna present a study in contrasts: childhood and age; the gentle shoot and the full, ripe corn; the sapling and the full-grown oaks ready for heavenly transplanting; the closing of one age, the opening of a new one.



A WORD FOR SUNDAY

What a great consolation it is for us to realize that there are among us — hidden in obscurity — good and holy people, whose prayers and fastings help keep the world on the tracks. Too often only the evil make the headlines.

But there are the Simeons and Annas today, who live holy lives under trying circumstances, whose sacrifices and prayers bring blessings to us all.

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