

LENT REFLECTION 3

Jesus is presented in the Temple – Luke 2:33-35

And Jesus' father and mother were amazed at what was being said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to his mother Mary, "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed – and a sword will pierce your own soul too."

Collect

God of compassion, whose Son Jesus Christ, the child of Mary, shared the life of a home in Nazareth, and on the cross drew the whole human family to himself: strengthen us in our daily living that in joy and in sorrow we may know your presence to bind together and to heal; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen.**

Reflection

Nick Fawcett, a modern preacher and poet has written the following:

Meditation of Mary, mother of Jesus

What was that Simeon said –
 'A sword will pierce your soul'?
I spent so long wondering what that meant,
 tossing and turning on my bed,
 brooding and fretting when I'd a moment to myself.
It seemed such a strange thing to say,
 especially at what was meant to be a time of joy.
We'd only had Jesus a few days,
 and my heart was still bursting with happiness.
We were over the moon,
 Simeon too, that's the odd thing –
 he was almost dancing with delight.
But then his expression clouded,
 and he gave that awful warning which has haunted me ever since.
I just haven't been able to forget it, try as I might.
Always the question has been there,
 nagging away at the back of my mind,
 even in the brightest moments:
 what did he mean?
And if you'd asked me as little as a week ago
 I still wouldn't have been sure.
Oh, I'd a fair idea by then, of course –
 the fears were mounting up –
 but I'd still kept on hoping,
 praying that I might be wrong.
Now I know though,
 all too well.
My heart is not just pierced –
 it's broken!
For I've stood here today and seen my son die.
I watched him cursed and ridiculed, scourged and beaten.
I watched as they hammered nails through his hands
 and lifted him on to a cross.
I watched in agony and cried out in despair.

And a moment ago I watched as they plunged a spear into his side.
At least he didn't feel that –
 thank God he was dead by then –
 but I did.
It thrust deep inside,
 running me through without mercy.
I've never known such pain,
 such agony,
 such horror.
And now life has gone for me too;
 I feel it has nothing left to offer.
Yet he's given me joy,
 no one can take that away.
He was with me for thirty wonderful years,
 everything a son could be –
 not many mothers can say that.
I've had joy,
 and now I have pain.
Maybe that's the way it had to be,
 the way it has to be,
 if there's to be any joy at all.

The prophetic words of Simeon, representative of the 'faithful remnant' of Israel who persisted in their faith and expectation of the coming of the Lord's Messiah, pull no punches. Simeon has just uttered his paean of thanksgiving and praise to God in the words of 'Nunc Dimittis'. He recognises the privilege of personally being witness to the fulfillment of God's promises – the wait has been worth it! His joy is wholehearted and would have caused a stir in the crowd and not least in Mary and Joseph who 'were amazed' at what was being said about their new born.

It will have been Simeon's quiet and ominous words in Mary's ear that will have made a more lasting impression. We are told elsewhere that Mary was someone who 'stored all these things and pondered them in her heart...'. Parents and carers (despite our ambitions) are not experts – how often do we wish that there was a complete script we could parrot out for perfect parenting; and how often do we realize what we *should* have said 10 seconds *after* the bedroom door slams shut!

Nick Fawcett's *Meditation of Mary* permits a mature Mary (30 something years after the Temple incident) her own 'Nunc Dimittis' moment with its mood of 'Ah, so that's was what it was all about...' Whether or not we are parents we too will wonder and be drawn to ponder. And, in doing so, we will share in experiencing the sharp and penetrating sword of incomplete comprehension in all the challenges and opportunities of our lives.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER OR DISCUSS

What helps you to maintain your faith and retain your place in the 'faithful remnant' of believers in our own time?

Have you experience of a 'Nunc Dimittis' moment where longstanding hopes or fears have been fulfilled and suddenly make sense despite the joy or the pain?

On 'Mothering Sunday' how might we do more to nurture the faith of those around us?

Tim