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CANDLEMAS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, February 2nd, 2025)

Viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum.
My eyes have seen Thy salvation.
(*Lk 2:30*)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

THE WORDS UTTERED by the old Simeon form the third canticle in the New Testament, according to the order of the events narrated in the first pages of the Gospel, but also according to the place the Church has assigned to it in the Roman office for the hour of Compline. It comes after Zacharias' canticle, the *Benedictus*,^a sung during the hour of Lauds; it hails the dawn of salvation, and springs from the lips of a happy father, full of the Holy Spirit, whose tongue has just been loosed when he confirmed the name of his son, the Precursor: John (which means 'God gives His grace'). It also comes after the thanksgiving canticle par excellence, the *Magnificat*,^b sung during the office of Vespers, in which Mary pours out her heart, deeply moved by God's such overwhelming kindness, and which she sung before her cousin, Elizabeth. Simeon's canticle completes the Christian day in the light of hope.

a. Lk 1:68-79.

b. Lk 1:49-55.

At the beginning of this Jubilee year, we should go back to these canticles, and ask ourselves what importance we give to thanksgiving and hope. Both reveal the degree of

communion of our souls with God, they reveal to what extent we renounce our own will, so as to strive to consider everything in the light of God.

Such is the path the old Simeon invites us to tread this morning.

Today's encounter is possible only due to the fulfilment of the commandments of the law of Moses. The evangelist Luke was informed by Mary, and he has recorded two events that took place in the Temple of Jerusalem. The first one is that told this morning, and twelve years later, the recovery by His parents of the Child Jesus among the doctors. However, it is very likely that these visits were not the only ones. St. Luke notes that "His parents went to Jerusalem every year for the feast of the Passover."^c

c. Lk 2:41.

Simeon, too, was a devout man. His life of faith wasn't limited to mere practices: he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," and the Gospel adds, "the Holy Spirit was upon him."^d

d. Lk 2:25.

Let us listen to Pope Benedict XVI:

With our faith we can go to meet Christ, but He alone can make us Christian and give to our will and to this desire of ours the response, dignity and power — which we ourselves do not possess — to become children of God. [...] God made Himself the Son of Man so that man might become a son of God.^e

*e. BENEDICT XVI,
Angelus, Baptism
of the Lord
(January 8, 2012).*

Simeon had thus for a long time been living and walking at the pace of God, in a complicity of every moment, awaiting the divine gifts. The silence of his heart was opening up to the Word of God.

It behoved Simeon to receive in his arms Him Whom the Nazareth Virgin had received in her bosom, according to the foretelling he had received from the Holy Spirit "that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord."^f

f. Lk 2:26.

The place of the encounter is not insignificant. It is the Temple, the quintessential place of communion with God, the place where Zacharias had had the vision foretelling

John the Baptist's birth, the place where, twelve years later, the teachers will be taught.

God has kept the promise made to Simeon: "My eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples."^g

g. Lk 2:30.

What is this salvation? A child. This very child, whom angels had announced with equivalent words to a few shepherds: "This day is born to you a Saviour, Who is Christ the Lord, in the city of David."^h This very child, who was announced to Herod as "the ruler who is to be the shepherd of my people Israel."ⁱ

h. Lk 2:11.

i. Mt 2:6.

Simeon may now pursue his way in peace. Through the consolation of Israel which is now under way of fulfilment, he himself becomes a consoled one. David in his distress had already asked the Lord: "Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation."^j

j. Ps 50 (51):14.

Today's gospel incites us to realise that salvation is not some speculative, devoid of flesh, reality. Salvation is carried out, it becomes incarnate, in a child: the Saviour. The encounter with Jesus then allows us to precise the Psalmist verse and apply it to each of us: Restore to me the joy of being a "saved one." Restore to me the joy that my neighbour, too, should be a "saved one."

In Christ each life, marked with the sign of salvation, receives a new light. As He loads Christ with the weight of our own misery, God makes us free from sin. The eyes with which we consider our overwhelming misery are then transfigured. The reality of sin has not disappeared, but it takes on a new meaning. Assumed by Christ, sin, from what it used to be, a victory of evil, a defeat of love, becomes the place of the triumph of God's mercy, the place of an invincible hope, offered to all men, since God wants all men to be saved.^k

k. Cf. 1 Tm 2:4.

Let us listen once again to Pope Benedict:

And only where God is seen does life truly begin. Only when we meet the living God in Christ do we know what

l. BENEDICT XVI,
Homily for the
inauguration of the
Pontificate
(April 24, 2005).

life is. We are not some casual and meaningless product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is loved, each of us is necessary. There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.¹

Indeed, Simeon may now go in peace. The Temple, and his encounter with the Lord, become for him the place of a new journey. It is this journey that we always have to undertake, always have to take up again. We are soon going to receive into our hearts by Eucharistic communion Him Whom Mary commended into the arms of Simeon. May we then go in peace in true joy, giving thanks to be “saved ones,” and to be before the world witnesses to this joy.

Amen.

