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CANDLEMAS

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, February 2nd, 2026)

Dimittis servum tuum... in pace.
Thou dost dismiss Thy servant... in peace.
(Lk 2:29)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

LET US CONSIDER this morning old and holy Simeon's figure. As the Baptist, he is at the junction point between the Old and the New Testament. Both men have received from the past centuries the heirloom of the old covenant. They are, as it were, its trustees. But to the old covenant succeeds a new one in Christ. As the Baptist, Simeon is meant to receive the Lord, and carry out on Him a ministry of sorts. Concerning the Baptist, he will have to confer baptism in water. As for Simeon, the charisma of prophecy is going to manifest itself in him.

Who is Simeon? St. Luke presents him as “a man who was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.”^a This wait is truly the wait of a whole people, the people of Israel. Centuries have elapsed. The voice of the prophets has grown silent. Very few people are now waiting for the coming of the promised Messiah. In Simeon, however, this wait has remained keen. He knows that once it is finished, the consolation of his people will come.

a. Lk 2:25.

And this wait is the compass of his life. “For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.”^b Therefore, “the Holy Ghost was in him.”^c Simeon was living in a true intimacy with God. “For whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.”^d

b. Mt 6:21.

c. Lk 2:25.

d. Rm 8:14.

Simeon was a trustee of the promise made to Israel. He was also the trustee of a personal promise:

He had received an answer from the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord.^e

e. Lk 2:26.

But being the trustee of a promise is one thing, knowing how this promise will be carried out, and peacefully waiting for its fulfilment, is quite another.

Simeon remains docile. He allows himself to be led by God, remaining in peace and joy. Thus, led by the Spirit, he came into the temple at the very moment when His parents were bringing the Child Jesus, to perform the custom of the law concerning Him.

It is a touching scene. We can easily imagine the old man receiving from the young parents’ hands the Divine Child into his arms. The Magnificat antiphon of the first Vespers plunges us into the mystery:

The old man was bearing the Child, but it was the Child Who was leading the old man. A virgin gave Him birth, and after this birth, she remained a virgin. Him Whom she begat, she adored.^f

f. Antiphon for Magnificat,
1st Vespers, February 2nd.

In these words, we find again the mystery already evoked in the office of the feast of Mary, Mother of God:

How wondrous an exchange! The Maker of mankind has taken to Himself a body and a soul, and has vouchsafed to be born of a Virgin; He is come forth conceived without seed, and has made us partakers of His divine nature.^g

g. 1st antiphon of Lauds,
January 1st.

Simeon is the happy beneficiary of this wondrous exchange. The words he utters at this moment bear witness to that fact. They constitute the third canticle taken from the Gospel, which in the Roman office the Church has assigned to the hour of Complines, thus ending the day on a note of hope:

Now Thou dost dismiss Thy servant, O Lord,
According to Thy word in peace:
Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation,
Which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:
A light to the revelation of the Gentiles,
And the glory of Thy people Israel.^h

h. Lk 2:29-32.

The reading of the Gospel ends there this morning. Before he goes away, Simeon blesses the holy family, and addressing Mary, he adds this prophecy:

Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that, out of many hearts thoughts may be revealed.ⁱ

i. vv. 34-35.

It is a striking contrast. After he has encountered the Child Jesus, the old man departs in peace, while at the same time foretelling war. The sword that will pierce Mary's heart, will also throughout mankind's history pierce the hearts of the peacemakers, of the witnesses of God's love for men. The wondrous exchange offered to all men will shatter against the hard and closed hearts of God's enemies.

This remains true, as we can see with our own eyes, in our very country, unfold a sorrowful episode of this "third world war fought piecemeal," according to Pope Francis's formula.

Here are revealed the thoughts of many hearts, especially the deep scorn for human beings, for their lives which should be respected from their first moment until their natural death, for the conscience of so many men and women, which should be protected by law in the legitimate choices they make, that are an honour for them.

To the children in their mothers' wombs, to the elderly persons lying on their hospital beds, the Divine Child opens the path leading towards this wondrous exchange. Let us give thanks for so many religious congregations, for so many institutes which have for many centuries now kept surrounding elderly people with love, inviting them to prepare themselves to the encounter with the God of consolations. We should support these houses by our prayer and in a concrete way.

Soon, an iniquitous bill of law might prevent them to remain in our country, which would thus turn into a place where a totalitarian power would scorn human conscience, and its right to respect and accompany human life in its weakness.

No, a country does not get greater by legalizing euthanasia or abortion. What is more, it disgraces itself. No, it is not treading on a path of progress. He who opens the gaping chasm of the culture of death will end up engulfed into it, as history has shown it. Let us add that it is unacceptable and revolting that members of parliament should arrogate the right to constrain institutes and healthcare providers to take part in such practices.

On the evening of his election, Pope Leo invited us to live “an unarmed and disarming peace.” Let us follow the footsteps of old Simeon, who departs in peace. Let us wish to the men and women of today, especially to elderly people, a peace that stems from encountering Christ. The light is rising. Hope.

Amen.

