

### Like Parents, Like Children

By: Fr. Munachi E. Ezeopu, CSSP

A scholar was conducting a study of an Amish village. The Amish are a branch of the Mennonite church who live in traditional rural villages far from industrialization and technology: no computers, television, refrigerators and telephones. In his study of the Amish village school, the researcher noticed that Amish children never screamed or yelled. That surprised him. So he decided to check it out with the schoolteacher. He told the teacher that he had not once heard an Amish child yell, and asked him why that was so. The teacher replied, "Well, have you ever heard an Amish parent yell?" The inference is clear: Like the parents, so the children!

We are familiar with Mother's Day and Father's Day which we celebrate every year. Why is there not a Parent's Day where we celebrate father and mother together as a couple? Today should be a good day to focus on both parents together, as we see both parents of Jesus, Joseph and Mary, together make the long journey to Jerusalem to present their firstborn child in the Temple as the law of God required. In the image of Joseph and Mary presenting Jesus in the Temple, we have a wonderful model of husband and wife united in practicing the faith and in raising their child in the faith.

We read that **"When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord"** (2:22) There is a confusion of detail here because, according to Jewish law, purification was for the mother alone while presentation was for the child. The story appears to be speaking of the two ceremonies as if they were one. Luke stresses the fact that they are doing it **"as it is written in the law of the Lord"** (verse 23). Joseph and Mary are presented as people who keep God's laws. Moreover, they are presented as doing it together. It is easier to walk in the ways of God when husband and wife walk it together and encourage each other along the way. The author of Ecclesiastes had something like this in mind when he wrote: **"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"** (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10). Husband and wife are companions in the journey of life, especially in the journey to our ultimate destination. We see this as we contemplate Joseph and Mary together in the Temple in obedience to God's law.

The aspect of today's celebration that some people have a problem with is this: why would the baby Jesus, who is not in a position to say yes or no, be initiated into the Jewish religion without his consent? This is a problem especially for those of us who question the value of infant baptism. Some Christians today feel that baptism has no value until a child reaches the age of reason and then is able to decide for oneself. But this is not the example that Mary and Joseph are giving us today. The concern about the value of infant baptism is a concern that is born out of the exaggerated individualism of the modern society. In the biblical era, people saw the whole family as one entity. The question of husband, wife and child belonging to different religions was unthinkable because religion was supposed to play a role in cementing the family unity. Thus we hear in Acts of the Apostles that when certain men and women were converted, they were baptized together with all their household (Acts 16:15, 31; 18:18).

If parents are supposed to provide their children with the basic necessities of life, what is more basic than one's faith in God. No parents would think of allowing their children to decide whether they want to go to school or not, whether they want to learn the common language or not, whether they want to be a citizen of their country or not. We make these decisions for them, knowing fully well that when they grow up, they may decide to continue with what we gave them or abandon it. But only a foolish parent would refuse to send a child to school or teach a child their language and tradition in the name of respecting the child's freedom to choose. Similarly parents have a responsibility to initiate their children into their faith traditions. This is what we see today in the feast of presentation as Joseph and Mary present Baby Jesus in the Jewish Temple.

As parents, we have the duty and privilege of raising our children in such a way that they grow up to become good and responsible citizens as well as committed children of God. The example of Joseph and Mary, and the example of the Amish community, show us that the best way to achieve this is not just by talking and shouting at them but by leading the way and showing them by example of our own lives.

### READINGS OF THE WEEK

Malachi 3:1-4

Hebrews 2:10-18

Luke 2:22-40

February 2, 2014

# 靈 修 生 活

## 獻 主 節 — 在 愛 中 犧 牲

江 上 行

按照教會的禮儀年曆，聖誕期過後不久，聖教會即將又要進入另一個截然不同的時期——四旬期，準備主基督復活來臨的時期。在這期間，卻有一個容易被忽略，又堪稱是聖誕節與復活節之間的過渡節日——獻主節。

謙遜的聖母在小耶穌誕生後的四十日，也帶同了斑鳩，守取潔並遵行奉獻首生男孩給上主的規定。正如小耶穌受割損禮一樣，這對母子也一同遵行了在社會制度下當守的法律，他們的行為心思同出一轍，正因為他們的關係也是如斯密切，所以，獻主節不單是主耶穌的節日，也是聖母的節日。

獻主節當日的禮儀，也強調了主耶穌親自來到我們中間，在滿全了當守的法律背後，其實還蘊藏著基督為我們帶來的愛和帶來的光明。所以進堂後的祝福蠟燭，就是喻意基督是一切光明的泉源。聖母進入聖殿奉獻耶穌時，西默盎更以雙臂接受耶穌，這指向聖母把她的親子帶給世人，世人透過西默盎的雙手迎接而接受了這新生君王。於是，西默盎和亞納都成為這光的先見者。

香港教區自二千禧年開始，便響應普世教會把二月二日獻主節訂為修會獻身生活，目的是使修道人士一方面重宣聖願，一方面又能更新獻身生活。

「奉獻」意味著愛，意味著犧牲。聖母心存愛，所以她可以謙卑；聖母心存愛，所以她願意將耶穌奉獻在加爾瓦略山上滿全祂的救贖大恩。聖母手抱著小耶穌進入聖殿，呈獻上主；同樣，我們提牽著聖母的衣邊，也被帶到上主的祭台前作奉獻。

且看，三賢士為新生的君王獻上黃金，乳香，沒藥，我們的獻禮也滿載著信望愛，並把我們的過去，現在和未來，倚仗聖母，在她的轉求中，獻於上主。今天我們每個人都渴望追隨主基督，但我們又如何上達於主前呢？聖母既把救主帶到人間，聖母便是扮演這通傳者的最佳人選，讓我們每一個人也都記起，趁此佳節，籍著聖母，通向基督，奉獻自己的生活。

摘自「公教報」

## 本 週 讀 經

二 零 一 四 年 二 月 二 日

拉 3:1-4; 希 2:10-18; 路 2:22-40