

## Sermon: Presentation of Christ in the Temple 2021.

In our modern world, there is such hype concerning being a celebrity. Being a “someone”, someone famous – or at least knowing someone who is famous – seems to be very important to the vast majority in society. People are famous for being famous. But what are celebrities like? Are they worthy of the pedestal that so often they find themselves on? Are they somehow different to the rest of us just because they are a celebrity? Or are they just like you and me but happen to have a high profile career and are photographed a lot? And this got me thinking. Do we really know people, or do we only know the façade? The image? What about Jesus? Do we really know Jesus or do we only know an image of him? If it is the image what image do we have?

Is it Christ, empowered on the throne, seated at the right hand of God, robed in majesty and crowned with Glory?

Or is it of Christ on the cross, the suffering servant, the Lamb of God who died for us to take away our sins?

Or is it Christ the man, the baby born of Mary, the boy who grew up in Nazareth, was baptised by John the Baptist, attended wedding parties and had fun with his friends, and who spent time talking with people and caring for people?

Or is it Christ the healer, the miracle-worker who brings the dead back to life, makes the lame walk, the deaf hear, the blind see, the hungry fed, the unloved loved?

Or is it Christ the teacher, the itinerant preacher opening peoples’ minds to the possibility of a new way of being with God through telling parables, stories, and reinterpreting the Scriptures?

Which ever of these mental images we have we are not going to be burnt as heretics at the stake since Christ Jesus is and was all of these images. These images just focus on different attributes and phases in his life. They show both his human nature and his divine nature, which is proper and just since Christ was and is both fully human and fully divine.

And yet, although we know that Christ is both fully human and fully divine, may I suggest that when we think of Christ we tend to forget the duality of his nature and focus purely on his divinity. We see Christ Jesus as *the Lamb of God* or as *the one seated on his throne* and we forget his humanity – the child who was circumcised at 8 days, the boy who ran away from home to be in the Temple, the man who ate with tax collectors and prostitutes. We can and do forget that God, in Christ, became fully human.

And this is not really surprising since we want and need to be reminded of the uniqueness and special-ness of Christ. We want to be reminded of the Glory of God

embodied in Jesus Christ. We want to see that he is holy – set apart! And this, after all, is the purpose of the Gospels. Their aim is to tell us all the wonderful things Christ did in order to convince us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. But the gospel writers were in a very privileged position. They knew, first hand, that Jesus was a human, so when it came to writing the gospels they wanted to emphasise the great works that he performed to show that he was more than a human. As a result, as we read the New Testament, there are only a handful of accounts referring to Jesus' childhood, and even when they do, it is normally because there is something extra-ordinarily special about that event. Now, correct me if I'm wrong, but very few of the stories in the New Testament show the ordinary, human side of Christ.

But today as a Church we are given the opportunity to reflect on the humanity of Christ alongside his divinity. Today we celebrate the Presentation of Christ in the Temple and as we have heard in the readings, Jesus is recognised as the Messiah by Simeon, a truly devout man. But Christ's presentation in the temple shows us something else too. It enables us to gain a glimpse of Jesus' humanity. It shows us that he was a normal baby boy. It shows us that he and his parents complied with the law. It shows us that he was one of us and that he did everything that was expected of him.

Not long after being ordained I was fortunate to go on pilgrimage to the Holy Land and actually walked in the steps of Jesus. This was an awesome and humbling experience, and it has really brought home to me the humanity of Jesus, since prior to this my mental picture of Christ had more to do with his divinity. But to see the terrain and the sights where Jesus would have taught his disciples, to see where he was born and to walk the Via Dolorosa - the final road Christ walked - was immensely powerful. In a twenty-first century way, I was able to put myself in Jesus' shoes and see how gruelling a walk it was from the Praetorium to Calvary and I was fortunate enough to be able to see both the glory of God and the suffering of humanity within the walls of the City of Peace – Jerusalem.

Today in our readings, we too have seen a glimpse of both the glory of God and the suffering of humanity. We have seen God's glory announced by Simeon and yet moments later heard Simeon prophecy despair and suffering. But above all in today's gospel, we have seen the human face of Christ. As Pilate said whilst Jesus was standing trial, *Ecce Homo, Behold the Man*, Today let us also say "behold the man". Can we honestly say that we know what Jesus is like behind the divine façade? Does our mental picture of Christ Jesus get in the way? Maybe we will never be able to fully comprehend his true nature, but I hope that won't stop us from trying. Let us therefore, try to see not only the divinity of Christ, but also the humanity of Christ. Let us try to see Christ in the people around us and, if we love Christ Jesus, let us embody that love with the people we meet.