

My Brothers and Sisters,

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. In the pre-Vatican II liturgy, today was the Feast of the Purification of Mary. As we heard in today's Gospel, Jesus' presentation in the Temple and Mary's purification were both requirements of the Old Law. In the book of Exodus, we read, "*Consecrate to me every first-born.... for it belongs to me*" [13:2]. In the book of Leviticus, we read, "*When the days of her purification for a son or for a daughter are fulfilled, she shall bring to the priest ...a yearling lamb for a holocaust and a pigeon or a turtledove for a sin offering*" [12:6].

If we are looking for anything comparable to the Presentation of Jesus today, it would be our practice of infant baptism. When babies are baptized, they become sons and daughters of God and, therefore, are consecrated to God, are consecrated to continue the work of Jesus, the Son of God. As we know, Jesus was prophet, priest, and shepherd-king. As Christians, we are all called to share the Good News of Jesus with others, to be healers and reconcilers, and to be servant leaders.

What are you afraid of? Think about it for a moment. If we are honest, we all have fears. Our fears are different at different times of our lives. For example, young children are afraid of the dark, or they are afraid of strangers, or they are afraid when they cannot see or find their parents. Adolescents often are afraid that they are not pretty enough or good looking enough, not smart enough, not athletic enough. They fear that others will not like them or that they will not be popular. They fear that they will not have a boyfriend or girlfriend. Young adults are often afraid that they will not get a good job, that they will not have enough money, that they will never get married. Married couples are often afraid that they will lose their job, and they are often afraid for their children, that something bad will happen to their children or that their children will make life-altering bad choices. As we get older, we often fear aging, sickness and death, both our own and our loved ones. We fear being alone. We fear losing our independence. One author grouped our fears into four categories: fear of failure, fear of rejection, fear of pain (I would suggest both physical and emotional pain), and fear of death.

Today's second reading tells us that because Jesus overcame death, he has freed those "who through fear of death had been subject to slavery all their life." In other words, Jesus, the Light, frees us from all fear by freeing us from the fear of death. Fifteen times in the Gospels, in his words to his disciples and others, Jesus tells us not to be afraid: do not be afraid of others; do not be afraid of the present; do not be afraid of the future; do not be afraid of your vocation; do not be afraid of sickness or death; do not be afraid of God or Jesus. To be fair and balanced, there is one time when Jesus does tell us to fear God to remind us that we are accountable to God: "*I shall show you whom to fear. Be afraid of the one who after killing has the power to cast into Gehenna; yes, I tell you, be afraid of that one*" [Luke 12:5].

My brothers and sisters, we all have fears. This is normal. On a human level, some people handle their fears better than others. However, in his First Letter, St. John suggests a connection, a relationship, between love and fear: "*There is no fear in love,*" St. John wrote, "*but perfect love drives out fear...*" [4:18a]. In other words, love frees us from fear: God loving us, us loving God, others loving us, us loving others. The more we experience authentic love in our lives, the more we give and receive love, the less fearful we will be.