

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION FOR THE MEMORIA OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE BVM

The *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* describes this *Memoria* as follows: “A feast kept on 21 November to commemorate the presentation of the Virgin in the Temple when 3 years old, as related in the apocryphal ‘Book of James’ [an extra-canonical Infancy Gospel, also known as the ‘Protoevangelium’]. The feast was first observed in the East *circa* the 8th century, and in the West gradually established itself in the later Middle Ages”. In the Eastern Churches, it is called the Entry of the Most Holy Theotokos (i.e., the One who gave birth to God) into the Temple and is one of the twelve Great Feasts of their liturgical year. There is no reference to any such incident in the canonical scriptures. However, as Pope Blessed Paul VI put it in *Marialis Cultus*, his Apostolic Exhortation for the Right Ordering and Development of Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary, there are Marian celebrations which “apart from their apocryphal content, present lofty and exemplary values and carry on venerable traditions having their origins especially in the East (#8)”.

The Commemoration of the Presentation of the BVM in the Temple may surely be regarded as one such Marian celebration. It emphasises the fundamental reality of Mary’s total giving of herself to God. It is a festival of commitment, of dedication, of consecration, to the Lord, who, as *the* Jewish prayer *par excellence*, the *Shema Yisrael*, declares, is to be loved with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our might (cf. *Deut* 6:4).

Church documents identify the Consecrated Life and the Religious State in one or other of its many forms. That, though, should not be taken to imply that other Christian lives and states are, somehow, “unconsecrated”. The definitive consecration, as it were, is effected in, and through, the Sacrament of Baptism, by which we are christened, “Christed”, anointed, through, with and in Christ, incorporated in him, and given a share in his three-fold office of Priest, Prophet and King.

All Christians are, therefore, consecrated to the Lord. All are called to realise that consecration in their lives. Each one of us, without exception, is thus called to be holy as God is holy, perfect as he is perfect. We are, in fact, called to be saints. We are holy, sainted, to the extent that we love God above all for his own sake and our neighbour as ourselves for the love of God. We are called to love God and the neighbour in the state and in the concrete life circumstances in which Providence has set us. We grow where we are planted. We grow in the Lord, not despite, but because of, our state and concrete life circumstances. The everyday realities of our lives, at home and at work, are the occasions, the instruments, of our sanctification. We rise to God “on wings of prayer”, indeed, but we rise, too, by means of the full and faithful discharge of the duties of our state, be they ever so “this-worldly”, ever so “mundane”, ever so “secular”.

Jacob awoke to the certain knowledge that the place where he found himself was the House of God, the Gate of Heaven (cf. *Gen* 28: 10-22). We, too, must wake in faith to the certain knowledge that we encounter God, and enter his Kingdom, in and through the actualities of our daily lives, which, for us, are the road to Emmaus and the way to the New Jerusalem.

This was the faith of those who established our schools. This was what energised them, drove them to do the ordinary extra-ordinarily well in the service of youth for the sake of the Gospel. This, too, is our *via regis*, our Royal Way, to the fulfilment of our baptismal consecration, to excellence in every aspect of our work, to the protection and promotion of our schools, their respective founding charisms, their Catholicity, their right conduct and their effectiveness in teaching and learning.