

In the story of presentation of Jesus in the Temple we read two elderly persons accepted that suffering was the way of life! But they did not lose hope in God, instead they became God's spokespersons of Salvation and Redemption in the midst of darkness and suffering.

What can we learn from the encounter of baby Jesus with two elderly persons? First, as elderly persons they experience suffering as impotence, as frustration. To be unable to act, to be powerless to help themselves, to want and to need to do something and not to be capable of doing it, these are the elements that constitute suffering as elderly people experience. Furthermore, in Simeon's and Anna's situation, especially living in a foreign dominated regime made them aware they could never use military means to liberate Israel free from Rome's control. How they would deal with suffering is indeed a very interesting question! One would say they could not have done anything? Yet they believed in a life of constant prayer and quiet watchfulness until the Kingdom should come. Simeon was like that: in prayer, in worship, in humble and faithful expectation he was waiting for the day when God would comfort his people. God had promised him through the Holy Spirit that his life would not end before he had seen God's own Messiah. In the baby Jesus he recognized that Messiah and was glad. Now he was ready to depart in peace and his words became the *Nunc Dimitis*, one of the great hymns of the Church.

One must doubt anyone who claims to have the Holy Spirit, and yet never constantly be in prayer, in worship and in humble and faithful expectation of the coming of the Kingdom of God. Many Christians proudly claim that once saved, they are always saved. That is simply religious rhetoric. I would personally prefer to follow Simeon and sing *Nunc Dimitis* in sincerity whenever possible. *'My eyes have seen your salvation.'*

Notice how Anna is described by Luke. She was a widow for a long time. In other words she was a person of sorrow. Sorrow and suffering has a lot in common. But her sorrow did not make her bitter, resentful against God. Instead she held fast her faith and hope in God. Luke tells us Anna was eighty-four years of age. She was old and she had never ceased to hope. Recently we have a royal commission into aged-care. It gives the impression age can take away the bloom and the strength of our bodies and therefore requires professional health care. But age can do worse. Old age can take away the life of our soul until the hopes that once we cherished die and we become dully content and grimly resigned to things as they are. That is we have forgotten to sing *Nunc Dimitis* at any moment.

One wonders why Simeon and Anna would hold fast their hope in the midst of suffering and sorrow. Wouldn't it be easier simply to give up hope altogether

when suffering has become a way of life? Both of them hold fast their hope because they know whom they trust. Their God is not a wishy-washy God. They believe their God is a faithful God who has kept his promises to them. Their God has made covenant with their people. They know their God would eventually send a Saviour and Redeemer to their midst.

Both of them encounter baby Jesus in the Temple, and immediately they recognize Jesus as the Saviour and Redeemer. Although Luke tells us it is by the Holy Spirit Simeon identifies Jesus is the one who brings salvation; this is not, however, a sudden outburst of the Holy Spirit. Rather it is the outcome of their perseverance in worship and in prayer in the Temple. Luke describes Anna: *She never left the Temple and day and night she worshipped with fastings and with prayers.* This can also be the same description of Simeon. According to the Jewish understanding, God's Spirit dwells in the holy Temple. They cannot be filled with the Holy Spirit anywhere else. We rob ourselves of a priceless treasure - the Holy Spirit - when we neglect to be one with God's worshipping people in church.

Both of them also never cease to pray. Public worship is great; but private worship is also great. As someone has truly said, 'They pray best together who first pray alone.' We have asked why Simeon and Anna would not lose their faith and hope in God when suffering is the way of life. In fact, Simeon's words to Mary, though very specific are also the reality of life in general. Now we know the answer, don't we? They never got tired of worship and prayer. It is in their constant worship and prayer they keep their contact with Him who is the source of life and strength.

What is the story of Simeon and Anna to do with me? Simeon says of Jesus, 'He will be a light for revelation to the nations and glory for your people Israel.' That is to say Simeon and Anna point us to Jesus, from the feeding-trough in Bethlehem to the empty tomb. And no matter who or where you are, and whether you are young and old, your life story is inextricably tied up with the story of Jesus.

We know very little of Simeon and Anna, but God used them and gave them a vocation to point out publicly that Jesus is the Saviour and Redeemer. Most of us will be just like them, our life story unknown to most people. But in God's plan, your life story becomes your vocation. And it is your responsibility to find out what God has given you. You can find out through constant worship and prayer.