



C.Ss.R.

PIRITUALITY

ONE BODY (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CORPO (Ef 4,4)

UN SEUL CORPS (Eph 4,4)

UN SOLO CUERPO (Eph 4,4)

JEDNA WSPÓLNOTA (Ef 4,4)

UM SÓ CORPO (Ef 4,4)

EIN LEIB (Eph 4,4)

ONE BODY

ADVENT 3

Biblical Testimonies for Advent

Meditation 3

Simeon and Anna

Simeon and Anna: Mature and Generous Senior Citizens, True Witnesses rather than Protagonists

For our 3rd meditation this Advent in order to prepare for the coming of the Lord - by preparation we mean being able to reflect a little on our personal and community life with the desire to tune it more closely to the Gospel – I propose to dwell on the witness of Simeon and Anna outlined in Lk 2:25-38. Luke's Gospel speaks to us of Simeon and Anna, two elderly people who made waiting for God their reason for living - precisely as a model for elderly believers. I want to recall here the prophetic words of Pope Benedict XVI, "What we need above all at this moment in history are people who, through an enlightened and lived faith make God credible in this world. Only through people who are touched by God, God can return to human beings."¹

1. SIMEON

Simeon or Shimon (from the Hebrew *Šim'on*) in Hebrew means 'God heard', "God hears". Who was this Simeon? The biblical apocrypha are full of speculation about him.² The Proto Gospel of James (an apocryphal text written in Greek and dated around 150 AD) says that Simeon was to be a high

¹ J. RATZINGER/BENEDETTO XVI, «L'Europa nella crisi delle culture», in: P. Azzaro – C. Granados, *La vera*

Europa. Identità e missione, Edizioni Cantagalli, Siena 2021, 235-247, qui 246-247. (Europe in a crisis of cultures).

² The Apocrypha are historical writings excluded from the biblical canon. The exclusion from the canon is based on the denial of the divine inspiration of these books.

priest. The Acts of Pilate tell us that Simeon was to be a rabbi. He was about to reach 112 years of age when he met Jesus, so says the **Pseudo-Gospel of Matthew**. Another apocryphal account says that it was the baby Jesus who spoke to Simeon and told him that his prayers had been heard. So, there is a beautiful narrative contrast: between the old man, 112 years old according to the apocrypha, and a small child; between a man about to end life's journey and a child who begins life. The old man Simeon represents the people of Israel who are coming to an end in this form. At the same time, however, **this old Israel is, as we feel, very young because of the presence of the Spirit**. Simeon, representative of an Israel that is coming to an end, heralds a renewed Israel, that is, he heralds the Church that will be a community upon which the Holy Spirit will descend, in which the Holy Spirit will live and which will be led by the Holy Spirit.

Simeon is presented having two characteristics: he was "a just and pious man" and he "waited for the consolation of Israel" (v. 25). With his waiting for "consolation" this elderly man embodies the great hope that animates Israel, the expectation of the messianic consolation (cf. Is 40:1; 49:13; 52:9). It cannot go unnoticed, the emphasis placed by Luke on the Holy Spirit in characterising the person of Simeon. The reference to the Holy Spirit occurs three times: "the Holy Spirit was upon him" (v. 25); "the Holy Spirit" had made a revelation to him - he would not die before having seen the Lord's Anointed (v. 26); finally, "moved by the Spirit, he went to the temple" (v.27).

The Gospel relates that Simeon "**received him [the child Jesus] into his arms and blessed God**" (v. 28). It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the original text does not say that he "took" Jesus, but that he "**received and welcomed Jesus**". This meaning is derived from the Greek verb *ἐδέξατο / edeksato* used here³ and highlights an important theological truth, that we all **receive (welcome) Jesus**.

Simeon is a witness to the revealed truth, expressed in a narrative way by the Evangelist Luke: **whoever walks guided by the Holy Spirit is always in the right place, at the right time and is thus able to receive/welcome Jesus**. And by receiving Jesus, one receives comfort and joy, just as Simeon expected: "**He was waiting for the consolation of Israel**" (v. 25). This waiting for consolation is the most important characteristic of Simeon. He embodies the great hope that animated Israel, the expectation of messianic consolation (cf. Is 40:1; 49:13; 52:9). Therefore, having received it in Christ, Simeon sings the joy of eyes that have seen and can now close: "now let your servant go in peace, O Lord, for my eyes have seen your salvation (...) light to enlighten the nations and glory to your people Israel (vv. 29-32). Simeon's eyes see in Jesus the light that is destined to shine before the face of the Gentiles.⁴ Simeon, the advanced in age "man touched by God" testifies that "through an enlightened and lived faith" the presence of God in history is highlighted.

2. The PROPHETESS ANNA

Unlike Simeon, who comes to the temple because of circumstances, moved by the Holy Spirit, the prophetess Anna is already in the holy place. Luke presents her in a concise manner: she was the daughter of Phanuel (her father's name recalls Penuel, i.e., "face of God": Gen 32:21). This name indicates the identity of a prophet. The prophet is in fact 'the face of God'. The Jews, who came from a nomadic life, lacked an elaborate philosophical vocabulary, when they spoke of the presence of a person, they spoke of a face. Thus, when the Israelites said: 'I stand before your face', by this phrase

³ The theme of the reception of Jesus, his message and his disciples are central in the Third Gospel (Lk 8,13; 9,5.48.53; 10, 8.10; 18,17).

⁴ Cf. E. BOSETTI, Luca. Il cammino dell'evangelizzazione, EDB, Bologna 1995, 53-54.

they meant: 'I stand in your presence'. Thus, to be a prophet means "**to be the face of God**". We learn also that the prophetess Anna came from Galilee, from that *Galilea gentium* (of the pagans) despised by the Pharisees, Sadducees and scribes. Her origin confirms **that anyone, regardless of their origin, can be filled with the Holy Spirit.**

This woman's home, in old age, became the temple: "she never left the temple" (v. 37). This observation attests to the fact that Anna made the praise of God the sense and the reason for her daily life. The Evangelist Luke also makes it clear that she - in fasting and prayer - carried out a clear evangelising work since "she spoke of the child to those who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (v. 38). Anna's prophecy consisted in an enthusiastic speaking of Jesus to all those who were waiting for redemption.

Simeon did not spend his life regretting the past, but turned towards the future, striving to welcome and present to the world the one who is the 'Light to the Gentiles'. Anna in her old age tended towards the essential and remained strong in hope. For both of them, old age had not become a time of disappointment or helplessness, but the time of expectation, of hope. *Simeon and Anna are thus witnesses to the beauty of old age, when one does not live in regret of the past, but in hope and the desire to encounter God.*⁵

It is no coincidence that the Church has chosen the Gospel of the Presentation of the Lord to celebrate religious life. In fact: living for a long time in the temple to hear the Word of the Lord; remaining faithful to prayer and intercession for the world; accepting to dwell in expectation, are essential traits of religious life. But there is another element that is much more important. Luke tells us that Simeon and Anna **were not guided by their thoughts or feelings**, but by the Holy Spirit. Thus, the Evangelist reminds us that **spirituality is nothing other than living under the guidance of the Spirit of God**, listening to the Spirit of God.

3. Witnessing to Spiritual Vigilance during one's life as an elderly person.

The form that the Holy Spirit grants to consecrated life is 'prophecy'. Consecrated persons are called to be prophets. We must be grateful to Pope FRANCIS because, in his Letter on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, he has finally put an end to an ambiguity that had been cultivated for too long: "Evangelical radicalism is not only for religious: it is required of everyone". The note that distinguishes consecrated life, its specificity is not radicality, but prophecy: "Religious follow the Lord in a special way, in a prophetic way."⁶ All have been radically loved by God, all are called to radically love him. Which of us consecrated persons would dare say that our mothers were or still are less radical than we are in love, in giving of themselves, in service? We must, indeed, sometimes feel ashamed because our lives, after all, are more comfortable than that of our fathers and mothers. What prophecy is therefore entrusted to the consecrated life? Consecrated persons by the choice of Gospel values, they must, like the prophets in the Bible, "awaken the world" to the values of the kingdom of God.⁷ Consecrated persons are witnesses to a different way of acting and behaving in the world.

⁵ Cf. E. BOSETTI, Luca, 54-55.

⁶ FRANCIS, Apostolic Letter to all Consecrated Persons on the occasion of the Year of Consecrated Life, 21

November 2014, no. 2 in:

https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_letters/documents/papa-francesco_lettera-ap_20141121_lettera-consacraati.html [accesso: 10.11.2023].

⁷ Cf. A. WODKA, «Prooctwo życia osób konsekrowanych: „być domem” odkupionych relacji ewangelicznych»

[Prophecy in the life of consecrated persons "to be at home" for redemptive evangelisation] in: A. Dudek – R.

Kantor (edd.), *Życie konsekrowane znakiem wiarygodności Kościoła*, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w

Consecrated persons, in fact, come from the future and show what humanity will be like when redemption is fully accomplished. The prophetism of consecrated person consists precisely in "showing the world 'about itself' (...) that the new creation has indeed taken place and is tirelessly building for redeemed humanity that house for which every human heart yearns for."⁸

In the 5th Catechesis on Old Age entitled Fidelity to God's Visitation for the coming generation, the Holy Father FRANCIS addressed the issue of society today "which cultivates the illusion of eternal youth" and "the anaesthesia of the spiritual senses" - due to the excitement and dizziness of those of the body - affirming that more than ever we need witnesses of "**an old age endowed with the spiritual vigilance, the sensitivity of the soul**". The sensitivity of the soul (i.e., the spiritual senses) – he expounded then - is not simply about thinking about God or religion, but also about compassion and pity, loyalty and dedication, tenderness and honour, one's own responsibility and sorrow for the other. Today we are in great need of this sensitivity of the spirit, maturity of spirit, we need elders like Simeon and Anna: wise, mature in spirit who give us hope for life. And in this catechesis on the path to the fullness of old age FRANCIS said something relevant: "the people who accept that 'God's visitation is incarnated in their lives', accept that they are *no longer protagonists, but only witnesses*."⁹

Old age that has cultivated the sensitivity of the soul extinguishes all envy between the generations, all resentment, all recrimination for an advent of God in the coming generation, which comes along with one's own final end.

Attention should also be turned to the Post-Synodal Exhortation "*Christus vivit*" addressed to young people and the whole Church. Recurring in the text is the encouragement to the elderly to accompany young people in their daily lives, listening to them as they discover the mysteries of life and faith. Pope FRANCIS reminds us that this relationship, this dialogue between generations, is a treasure to be preserved and strengthened. "If the young and the elderly open themselves to the Holy Spirit, together they produce a wonderful combination"¹⁰ It is truly beautiful to realise, that Pope FRANCIS in his recommendations to elderly people speaks in the first-person plural, he therefore also speaks of himself, when he answers the three important questions: *What can we elders give to the young, tell and teach them?*

⇒ "To the youth of today who live their mixture of heroic ambitions and insecurities, we can remind them that a life without love is a sterile life".

⇒ "To fearful young people we can say that anxiety about the future can be overcome".

Krakowie, Kraków 2016, 88–104, qui 90.

⁸ A. WODKA, «Proroctwo życia osób konsekrowanych», 104.

⁹ Cf. FRANCESCO, Catechesi sulla Vecchiaia - 5. La fedeltà alla visita di Dio per la generazione che viene,

Udienza Generale, Aula Paolo VI, Mercoledì, 30 marzo 2022, in:

<https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/audiences/2022/documents/20220330-udienza-generale.html>

[accesso: 15.11.2023]. (Catechesis on the Elderly -5. Fidelity in the Visitation of God for the generations to come)

¹⁰ FRANCESCO, Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation "*Christus vivit*" To Young People and the People of God, Loreto

25 March 2019, no 192, in:

[https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html)

[ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20190325_christus-vivit.html) [accesso: 16.11.2023].

⇒ "To young people who are overly concerned about themselves we can teach that there is a greater joy in giving than in receiving, and that love is not only shown with words, but also with deeds."¹¹

The Holy Father thus seeks to renew in us the certainty: "if we walk together, young and old, we will be able (...) to attend to the future, to nurture enthusiasm, to germinate dreams, raise prophecies, make hopes blossom."¹²

Just as I was finishing work on this meditation, I got a message via WhatsApp: "Our Br Władysław Drozd C.S.S.R. returned to the Father's House in Gliwice at 2 p.m. Requiescat in Pace!" (In fact – we Redemptorists of the Warsaw Province - have a WhatsApp group called MEMORES, so named by a confrere who created it and monitors it every day. Every day we receive from him the notice of those in the province who have passed on to Eternity on that particular day. MEMORES is also a means of communicating about the passing of our confreres or of our relatives and to remember and to live in communion with those who are now with God). Immediately after this information of the death of the Redemptorist brother Władysław there were expressions of condolence from many confreres who offered their prayers for him. A young brother named Krzysztof remembered him with beautiful words: "A legend has passed away. "BROTHER" Władysław, thank you for your example of religious life, for your kindness, friendliness and smile. Your example of life has contributed a lot to the fact that today I too am a Redemptorist. May Jesus reward you!" I reported this to confirm the valid and sacred truth that the relationship between generations is "a treasure to be preserved and strengthened, because elderly witnesses can give, tell and teach so much to the young."

[Perspectives and further questions for one's own reflection:](#)

At the end of this 3rd meditation, I invite everyone to a short personal and community reflection. This time let us be guided by COMMUNICANDA No. 3 entitled *Discovering the best wine at the end. Reflections on the Third Age* written on 8 December 2000 by Father General Joseph W. Tobin, C.S.S.R.

- 1) Our founder, Saint Alphonsus, we read in the Communicanda, "Proposed that greater spiritual freedom could be achieved by reducing the extravagant control the circumstances of life might exercise over a person in order to become progressively freer to love God... The point that Alphonsus is trying to make is that we need to examine our lives honestly and see who or what has the ultimate claim on our heart. For, it is within our hearts that God longs to dwell. In chapter 11 of the Practice, Alphonsus asks: "Do you have a heart empty enough for the Holy Spirit to fill it?" (n. 26-27).

[Do I try to have a heart empty enough so that the Holy Spirit can fill it, in order to make God believable, as Simeon did?](#)

- 2) "In November 1774, as he was about to leave St Agatha, St Alphonsus wrote: "When I am back in one of our houses, I will be able to be useful to the subjects, especially to the young people'. It may be that Alphonsus saw himself as a tutor to the students in homiletics or moral theology. His biographers say that the example of his life as an elder had a strong impact on the young confreres. An elderly Redemptorist who does not let himself be overcome by the sufferings and limitations of age, but keeps alive joy, love and hope, is an invaluable mentor for the young confreres." (n. 33).

¹¹ FRANCESCO, *Christus vivit*, no 197.

¹² FRANCESCO, *Christus vivit*, no 199.

Do I preserve joy, love and hope as much as possible in all circumstances? Do I speak to others in an "enthusiastic" manner about Jesus, about God, as present here and now, just as the prophetess Anna did?

- 3) "At the end of life, all we will need is love: to love God as he must be loved and to love one another as brothers. The love of an elderly Redemptorist, expressed in very ordinary ways, can leave a lasting impression on his confreres, especially the young. (...) At the end of a life, love will give us mellowness and flavour, not the smarting sting of vinegar." (n. 35-36).

Am I a Redemptorist in whose presence the confreres feel welcomed, listened to, loved with "the love of Jesus"?

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Original in Italian

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ONE BODY is a text of prayer proposed by the Center for Redemptorist Spirituality. For more information: Fr. Piotr Chyla CSsR (Director of the Center for Spirituality - fr.chyla@gmail.com).