

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord — February 2, 2020

So we are 40 days removed from the Birth of The Child in Bethlehem ! Being faithful Jews, Mary and Joseph were on the road again making their way this time to the Temple in Jerusalem to complete the prescriptions of the law. The law of Moses required that the mother of a newborn male was to wait 40 days and then present the child to the Lord. For a female birth, it was 80 days (go figure guess who made the laws). And what blessings He had in store for them ! What an experience it must have been for the poor unassuming couple.

The story of Simeon is every man's story, and every woman's story as well. We are brought into this world that we might experience God's Revelation of Himself, before we come to the end of our earthly lives. The essential focus in the life of a Christian is to come to know, love, and serve Him, in our journey ! We may accomplish many wonderful things in the course of our lives, we might become accomplished or even outstanding in a particular field, we might amass a great fortune in the course of our lives, we might even be famous but all of that is just "lagniappe" as our Louisiana friends might say.

Simeon, a righteous and devout man, moved by the Spirit, comes to the Temple :
"It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Christ of the Lord. He came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to perform the custom of the law in regard to him, he took him into his arms and blessed God, saying : 'At last all powerful Master you can give leave to your servant....I can now die.' "

What an extraordinary experiencefor Simeon, for the parents, for the Rabbi, for Anna, and indeed for any who caught a glimpse of this awesome scene. Extraordinary as it was, it is really the same experience that is extended to each of us who choose to follow the Christian way. We are invited to come to see and to know Him before we depart this world. The Mission of the Church in the Modern world is to proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and to introduce would-be followers to Him in meaningful ways ! How difficult that task can be indeed. Yes ! You know it, and so do I. Being church is hard work !

I read a reflection recently on Leading a Church through change, some marvelous points in the reflection and one of 10 major points in the article was : **"It isn't easy"**

Here is a part of what it says :

"You know all those church conferences, books and blogs you read that are full of stories about how some pastor just turned things around at their church, saying "Jesus just paved the way" Yeah it's really never that easy. Change is hard, it takes time, and requires grit and courage. It is not for the faint of heart.

Anyone who tells you something different hasn't actually had to lead through change before."

Wow, I thought I sure can relate to thatand I am pretty sure you also can relate.

It is hard to believe that it is 10 years today (Feb 1, 2010) that I walked down this aisle for the first time as your pastor. Wow I pulled out those papers of appointment about 2 weeks ago as I began to reflect on this occasion. I've been here, and we have moved through a whole lot together in that time. It hasn't been easy for either of us, but I believe we have certainly been blessed..... and blessed abundantly by the Lord during that period. How easily that progress can fall out of sight, and be lost when we get caught up in our own world, and in peripheral agenda.

I still remember walking down that aisle for the first time, and all of those crazy questions in my mind Will they like me ? Will I like them ? How will we get along in advancing and moving this parish forward ? Will we move forward ? Will they want to move forward ? Some parishes are perfectly content right there where they are, and don't want anyone fooling with their nice orderly system ! So lots of questions now, we are down the road 10 years. And in summary many things have gone very well, some things not so well, and some things not well at all. So, here is a little flash view of my experiences and some of the many things we can celebrate where God has Blessed us.

With the help of many great people we developed an effective "First Friday" Healing Mass and celebration with a focus to minister to our Senior Adults, and provide them a forum to expand relationships. We invested in instruction for Catechists, who were gracious and generous in offering themselves and their time to initiate 'The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd' program. We now have a complete program for our elementary school level children ! It has been a hugely effective manner in instructing our kids, and we love the results and engagement we are seeing.

Having the best staff in place to effectively execute our programs to the maximum, has always been a high priority. And that has been a process through our tenure. We, as a staff, went to training for ChristLife, and then initiated the program here with huge success and fruitfulness. Many lives were strengthened, changed, and nurtured. The planned outgrowth of ChristLife was the formation of Small Faith Groups, and they have been a real catalyst for people who sought further growth and development in their faith journey.

We joined Divine Renovation in order to be led and directed by people who have found great fruit in their Ministry of leading and guiding parishes, not just in Canada and the United States, but throughout the world. Now, we have invested greatly in Alpha as an outreach program, most especially to reengage Catholics who have fallen

away from the practice of their faith, as well as un-churched individuals. We are taking His invitation seriously to : “Make Disciples of All Nations” !

Your participation and engagement in these programs has been way above the national average level of participation — So special “Kudos” to you on that your level of participation is pretty extraordinary, and I believe we can continue to parlay that into even greater engagement in Liturgy and all of the other many works that we do and services we provide !

Naturally, people are always concerned about finances ! ...can we do this or do that ? can we afford this or that ? So I would like to give you a brief review of how the Lord has blessed us during these past 10 years. We have spent more money investing in our people and our programs, and providing meals at programs, than ever before in the history of our parishand we have more money than we have ever had I consider that to be the abundance of the Lord in our midst.

When I arrived, we were paying our debt on the Family Life Center here on the letter of assignment it says we had a debt of \$891,426 we had savings of \$161,048, and cash in our checking account in the amount of \$44,187. In the meantime, we have purchased 10 Acres of land for \$400,000, we have renovated the offices to the tune of \$390,000. We have spruced up some of our buildings and made investments in staff and development programs ! Each year, with the exception of one, we have had an increase in giving, and today we have approximately \$2.4 million in savings. This represents almost a \$4 million turnaround in 10 yearsyour kindness and generosity I would say, has certainly borne fruit.

As I walked down the aisle today, I thought, we have been blessed abundantly through thick and thin, and I wondered what God has in store for us in the next phase ! I am truly grateful for your kindness and generosity, both personally, and for our community. I am grateful for the opportunity to be your pastor these past 10 years ! I have no doubt He has many more great things in store for us. May He continue to bless us abundantly.

— Fr. Gerry Hurley