

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord – February 2, 2020 – Very Rev. Bryan W. Jerabek, J.C.L.  
Bl. Miriam Teresa Demjanovich Parish, Bayonne, NJ – 10:30am & 12pm Masses – 675 words

The scene of the Presentation of the Lord is one of great joy; but like every happiness that we experience on this earth, it is limited in some way: there is, as it were, a dark cloud looming nearby. We cannot experience perfect joy until we are in heaven. In this “valley of tears” our happiness is always imperfect, incomplete, and passing. That was certainly the case for our Blessed Mother, for even as she shared in Simeon and Anna’s exultation about the fulfillment of God’s promises, she also heard those prophetic words: “you yourself a sword shall pierce”: Simeon prophesied the first of what we know as her seven sorrows.

Think about the worst thing that has happened in your life to date – cancer, a sudden death, the loss of someone on 9/11, or some other tragedy... We have all suffered many things; some, quite serious. But now, imagine learning about that suffering from God some 33 years in advance, as our Blessed Mother did. Thank God that he does not foretell our sufferings in detail! Oh, we know about it in a very general way – he warns us of the cross. But the Virgin Mary received a very particular revelation of sorrow that would pierce through to the depths of her soul – a very dark cloud in what was otherwise a moment of joy.

Our Lady did not recoil from future suffering, nor did she live in dread of it; rather, at every step of the way, her answer to God was a confident “yes”. When she and Joseph lost track of Jesus during their pilgrimage to the temple, later finding him back there – “in his Father’s house” – she did not fully understand; but she also did not resist or react against God’s plan. When Christ warned her about the consequences of his first miracle, changing water into wine and opening the way to the “hour” of his Passion and death, she did not back off; instead, she instructed the servants: “do whatever he tells you”.

Later, as the sword was starting to pierce her heart, she also did not change course. At no time did she try to prevent Jesus’ passion or her compassion. Indeed, she stood faithfully beneath his cross. As a mere human being like us, she may well have not fully understood what God was doing. She lived very much in the “obscurity of faith” – not always seeing clearly what the Lord had planned and how he would accomplish his purpose. Moreover, the foreknowledge of her suffering was surely a huge burden. But her answer was always “yes”: “be it done unto me according to your word”.

How often do we resist, push back, or even allow ourselves to live in dread of suffering? How often do we resent our sufferings? It’s as if our default answer were the opposite of Our Lady’s: while she was always ready to say “yes” to God – and did, in fact – yet we find it so easy to reject the crosses God permits us to carry! The uncertainty of what the future holds – the lack of foreknowledge of what we will suffer – perhaps hinders us. But imagine the burden of knowing it in detail, in advance. We might spend the rest of our life trying to avoid it. And we might thereby miss doing God’s will.

No, it is better that we do not know. Our Blessed Mother alone merited to carry that burden. But we must recognize: she carries us with it. She knows the outcome. She witnessed first-hand her son’s victory and the fulfillment of all God’s promises. It behooves us to meditate upon her sorrows and her faith – and then, to ask her to obtain for us the grace not only to say “yes” to the sufferings that God allots for us (for they are our share in the price of our salvation), but to live each day in the trust that whatever comes our way, she and our Lord Jesus Christ will be there to sustain us in hope.