**Feast of the Presentation of the Lord**

February1/2, 2014

Mal 3: 1-4; Heb 2: 14-18; Lk 2: 22-40

Do you remember the biblical account of the Passover in the Old Testament book of Exodus? The Hebrews had been slaves in Egypt for about 400 years, and Moses was trying to free them from Pharaoh. One night, God’s angel went throughout Egypt, striking down every first born son in the land except for those of the Hebrews. The Hebrews had been told by God to splash lamb’s blood on the doorposts of their homes and to stay in those homes that night. Those who were in those marked homes were spared that death; God “passed over” them. The next morning, Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt, out of slavery. God led them to freedom.

The Jewish people for all generations after the Passover remembered what God had done, not with fear, but with a profound sense of gratitude for the freedom given to them. God asked them to show their gratitude by offering to Him all their first born sons. Yes, each was to be given back to Him, redeemed, by presenting him in the Temple and offering a sheep or goat (if the family were wealthy) or a couple of pigeons (if the family were poor). This is what we hear about in today’s Gospel. Mary and Joseph presented Jesus in the Temple, fulfilling the Law by offering Him back to His Father.

When we hear about the Passover, God striking down all the first born sons in Egypt but sparing the sons of the Hebrews, what are we left to think about who God is in our lives? Who is God and how do I think of Him? What do I imagine Him to be like? Is He a God of fear, or is He someone else?

For so many of us, I suspect, God is out there, someone with whom we have to contend in our lives. He is someone we bump up against in life. He is someone who always seems to be restricting our freedom. We all have thought of God in that way. He is a God who says, “No.” We can’t do what we want because God says no. God is sort of a fussy, competitive being who will restrict and punish us if we mess up. So we end up dealing with Him when we have to, contend with Him when we want our way or want to do something that pushes the limit a bit.

If we think of God in these ways, what is the result? Well, we end up challenging God; we run the risk of losing our freedom and our happiness; we rebel against Him and we get lost.

Who then is God if He is not that? The Bible is filled with stories that tell us, filled with the prophets who explained Him to us, and Jesus Christ reveals to us the face of God the Father. He shows us who God is.

Yes, God is a Person who is completely just and so there will be consequences we will have to face if we sin and rebel against Him. But that is not the whole story. He is more. God is a Person who gives us a solid grounding. He is a God who over and over again frees us from whatever may enslave us. He is a God who gives meaning to our lives. He is a God to whom we are naturally drawn in our quest for Truth and freedom. He is not a God who competes with our freedom, but a God who gives it. He is a God who loves us so much He wants us to be completely fulfilled and eternally happy. He is a God who gives us strength to endure the Cross in our lives. He is a God whose commandments do not restrict us, but direct us toward real and true freedom.

***God never enslaves us. God frees us. God leads us. God loves us***. As we heard in today’s second reading from Hebrews, He is a God who has destroyed the power of death, destroyed Satan’s power over us and freed all of us who had been subject to the slavery of sin and He did this by becoming like us in every way but sin and then suffered and died and rose again.

God is just and there will be unavoidable consequences for our misdeeds and our sins if we do not repent, but He is more. He is a God who frees us and gives our entire lives meaning.

Mary and Joseph knew God in this way. They knew God to be, not a God of death and slavery but a God of life and freedom. Mary presented her divine son in the Temple, in gratitude and faith for great gift of freedom from slavery to sin. Let us present ourselves in this Temple, this Church this day, to the same God, for He has freed us from our old way of life, a life of sin, and has given us the gift of new birth and the freedom of His sons and daughters.