

## February 2, 2014 – Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord – Year A

### Why?

"Neighbor! -- Why do you -- choose to come -- to Corpus Christi?"

Hold it! Don't answer that question.

That's for later.

A story.

Mom calls out: "Johnny, clean up your toys; it's almost supper time!"

Johnny replies: "Why, Mommy?"

"Johnny, it's almost supper and people will be walking through that area where you have all your cars and trucks spread out and they might fall on one of them.

They might even step on one a break it and you would not be happy.

And, after you clean you toys off the floor go wash your hands."

Johnny replies: "Why?"

So Mom explains so more: "Johnny, we only put food in our mouths and who knows all the places you have had your fingers this afternoon."

Need I say any more?

Yes, it can get annoying when people keep asking that question, "Why?"

Well, prepare yourselves because I am going to ask that question quite a bit in this homily.

Last Sunday was the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time.

So, why is today not the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time?

Today's feast is celebrated on February 2<sup>nd</sup>.

It is called the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Why don't I remember that happening before?

Well, it has been 11 years since we had a February 2<sup>nd</sup> on a Sunday - yes, back in 2003.

Today's Gospel is the story that is behind the name of the Feast of the Presentation.

In the first line of the Gospel we hear about a "purification."

Why a purification?

According to the Book of Leviticus (12:2-8) when a mother gives birth to a child she will not be allowed into a holy space or touch a holy object until she has been purified.

Blood and bleeding were reasons to consider one ritually "impure" and Mary had to wait 40 days after giving birth until she could be considered purified again.

[Note - today is 40 days after Christmas].

The purification is made formally by bringing an offering to the Temple. Since Mary and Joseph were poor they only had to bring two small birds.

Also, according to Exodus (13:2, 12) the firstborn son was to be consecrated and dedicated to the Lord - reminding the Israelites how the Lord freed them from the slavery to the Pharaoh in Egypt.

Mary and Joseph brought baby Jesus to the Temple to present Jesus to the Lord and so the appropriate rites could be performed. This action did not have to take place in the Temple but it seems convenient that the *purification* of Mary and the *presentation* of Jesus could take place during the same Temple visit.

Now the big question: "Why did St. Luke put these stories in his Gospel?" After all, Luke was a gentile and he was writing his Gospel to a gentile audience.

What would the gentiles care about a Jewish religious practice? From a little research it appears that St. Luke includes this part of the

story to show that Jesus was well connected with the Old Testament practices AND that he was the fulfillment of that Old Testament.

The next part of today's Gospel confirms that even more.

The two elders in the story, the prophets Simeon and Anna, have been waiting for the Messiah.

Due to the influence of the Holy Spirit they recognize Jesus as that very Messiah they are awaiting.

Now I think I found the real answer to the question:

"Why did Luke write this story?"!

Listen as Simeon blesses God and says:

"Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace,  
according to your word,  
for my eyes have seen your salvation,  
which you prepared in the sight of *all* the peoples:  
a light for revelation to the *Gentiles*,  
and glory for your people Israel."

St. Luke is pointing out to his gentile readers that they are invited to be part of community, part of the Church, part of the people of God!

St. Luke is inviting the gentiles to follow Christ in the Christian community!

Inviting - yes, that is the key concept here.

This parish of ours has a fine reputation for being warm and welcoming.

We hear that all the time because it is so true.

Warm and welcoming.

In meetings with other parish members and with Fr. Don,

some of us are wondering about offering the parish a challenge to go *beyond* warm and welcoming.

Our new challenge is for us to be more like St. Luke,

*to become more inviting.*

We, here in 2014, can participate in the mission of St. Luke, the mission of bringing people to Christ by inviting them here to Corpus Christi.

That question at the beginning of the homily:

"Why do you -- choose to come -- to Corpus Christi?"

is a little warm up exercise for us to become more inviting.

If we know why we choose to come here,

we can use that when the time is right with a friend, a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor, a time when we can say

"You would really like my church. I choose to go there because ...!"

Yes, the reason why you come here can be a just a few words or maybe it is a long story.

I would love to see your answer and to share it with others.

You can write a short note on the cards in the pew or

you can send me an e-mail to the address on the card.

When you fill out a card today you can place it in the box here at the altar when you bring up your offering today.

Now, with all that in mind,

I now invite you to follow through on that very first question and turn to your neighbor:

"Neighbor - I choose to come here because ...."