

Monsignor Dennis Sheehan Homily Given on February 2, 2003 The Presentation of the Lord

Simeon and Anna again?! We just met them a month ago! What are they doing here again today? Do they have all that much to say to people of faith, seekers, and listeners in 2003?

Part of the explanation for their double-featured appearance this season is an accident of the calendar. February 2, the Feast of the Lord's Presentation in the Jerusalem Temple, only falls on Sunday every seven years or so. But there's more to their double appearance than mere calendar coincidence. Simeon and Anna on today's liturgical screen speak to us of a wonderful quality of faith. They can find God in the most unlikely and ordinary. This quality alone would merit our looking at them more closely. There's more here, we say, than meets the eye.

Simeon's approach to life is pretty central to today's story. Listen to how St. Luke describes him: righteous and devout and waiting for the consolation of Israel. The Holy Spirit – the same Holy Spirit you and I received in baptism – was in Simeon's mind and heart. That spirit gave Simeon a kind of inner eye. He was looking, with that inner eye of faith, for the promised Christ.

Now surely Simeon must have tried to imagine the Christ, the Messiah. Handsome and striking? Probably. Tall? Probably. A commanding presence? You bet! What would the Messiah be doing when Simeon came upon him? Teaching? Leading an army? Recruiting followers? After all, Simeon had read time and again the picture painted by the prophet Malachi in today's first reading: "Suddenly there will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek." His coming will astonish, amaze, dumbfound, said the prophet. He will be like a fire hot enough to melt metal, like a lye that can burn through any obstacle.

So here today, this same Spirit leads Simeon to stand before an ordinary young couple with a very ordinary-looking baby. They were among hundreds who milled about the courts of the temple every day. Astoundingly ordinary. Then looks that inward eye, that Spirit-ed vision of Simeon. It probably took him a few minutes to get his bearings. Whoever promised that the Messiah, the promised Savior, would be a baby? But then, Simeon remembered, God is full of surprises. God is forever finding unlikely candidates. Who would you or I have chosen to go up against Goliath, the Philistine giant, hundreds of years earlier? Surely not some sapling youngster with a slingshot. But that's who God chose. Simeon knew that – and realized with his inward eye of faith that God had done it again! Here was the messenger, the refining fire, the promised Savior – and he was a baby! That took some looking. That really needed the inward eye.

Well, you might say, Simeon is special. He's inspired. He has a gift. I could never do that! No? Read on. See who comes next. She's old, widowed, forgotten by the world – a woman in a world where women had no voice. It would be easy to pass Anna by or fail to see her remarkable gift. Who was she to recognize the Lord? Yet somehow she, too, had the gift the Spirit, the inward eye. She was open enough – or perhaps empty enough, connected enough – to look at Mary, Joseph, and the baby and see – not just a present child but the Savior.

Luke says Anna was a "prophetess". That doesn't mean she had a set of parlor tricks or that she would rearrange the Scripture to predict the future. She's a prophetess because she has the inward eye. She can look at things very ordinary and see the most marvelous presence within. He's a prophetess because she can invite the whole world to look at things in a new and different way.

Simeon and Anna could look at a tiny babe and see that the world had changed. They would see that everything they hoped and longed for – freedom, salvation, healing life – was right here in the most ordinary and unlikely faces.

It happens right here too. We have our Simeons and our Annas. They are not taller or younger or smarter or more articulate. They're just more tuned in to what's beyond the probable and the obvious.

These folks with the inward eye will speak of peace when everyone else sees nothing but war. These Spirit-willed people will speak for life in a world grown careless about life in its weakest moments: the unborn, the old, the very ill. These people look beyond the obvious. When everything around them is frenzied, they find time for prayer. When the empty eyes or the outstretched hand on the street seems merely another derelict, they can see the face of Christ.

The inward eye. We all have it. But, like our natural vision, it often gets blurred and weak. Perhaps, in the words of an anonymous writer, too many of us wait to see what God will do for us. People with the inward eye look for what God will do *with* them.

Simeon and Anna were certainly worth a second visit. They remind us of the quality within us too often neglected or forgotten – the Spirit-filled inward eye of faith. They tell us that, no matter how ordinary the day, no matter how difficult or hopeless the experience, God is present, working in mysterious ways. So look again, brothers and sisters. Polish up your inward eye. Maybe, with Simeon, all of us can say: "My eyes have seen your salvation." It's right there. Look again!