

Saints Simeon and Anne

Jerusalem, February 6, 2022

Dear brothers and sisters,

May the Lord give you peace!

I am grateful to the Lord for being able to celebrate with you the memory of Saints Simeon and Anne, to whom this chapel and this house is dedicated. I have not celebrated this feast with you for many years. I thank Providence for this occasion.

I also rejoice at the renovation of the chapel, which is now even more beautiful. Although small and somewhat hidden, it is nevertheless a precious presence in the heart of the New City of Jerusalem. It is the place where every day, in the heart of the Jewish world of the city, people pray, adore and intercede, and where the Church, silently, not in academic meetings but in everyday life, concretely builds relationships and seeks forms of dialogue and fraternity with the people of Israel.

In fact, your small community has this special mission not only for our Church in Jerusalem but also for the entire universal Church, a mission that is complex and not easy, but perhaps precisely, for this reason, all the more necessary: to be witness to the love of Jesus among the Jewish people; to love Jesus and to love the people of Israel, while seeking to overcome and bridge the mutual misunderstandings, linked to our difficult common past, linked to today's politics, linked, in short, to the various misunderstandings that still unfortunately exist among us today. You have the important mission of being, for the whole Church, that precious link between it and the people who gave Christ to us. As an integral part of the Church of Jerusalem, you pray in Hebrew, your rhythms are marked by the Jewish calendar, your friendships and working, economic and social relationships are immersed in Israeli society. In short, you know these brothers of ours from the inside and, without judging them, you give concrete, real, lived expression to our common desire for a relationship with Israel.

It is a task that requires patience and parrhesia, love and firmness, vision and realism. It is a task that easily exposes us to loneliness, typical of those who live between the borders of identities, peoples and religions, and that requires a solid and deep love, which can only be nourished by a firm faith.

Simeon and Anna, the patrons of your community, are an emblematic example of that.

The setting is that of the temple in Jerusalem, where Mary and Joseph bring the child to fulfill the Law that requires all firstborns to be redeemed.

In fact, the Evangelist concentrates here on a series of anti-Constitution rites, but apparently with little precision. In verse 23, in fact, he speaks of "their" purification, that is of the mother and the child, while the purification concerned only the mother and not the child. Saint Luke then immediately moves on to another rite: the presentation of the newborn to God in the temple, a rite that was no longer in use at the time of Jesus, while he omits the ransom of the firstborn, which was instead prescribed by the Law (Nm 8,14-16), but that could be done anywhere, without necessarily going to the temple.

The intention of the Evangelist is to be able to tell the central event, that is, the meeting with Simeon and Anna, Israelites faithful to the Lord who, in obedience to the Spirit, receive the revelation of the presence of the Messiah.

On the one hand, in fact, obedience to the Law is emphasized: in 3 verses, from 22 to 24, Luke speaks three times of Mary and Joseph's obedience to the Law of the Lord ("According to the law of Moses... as the law prescribes...").

On the other hand, we find another obedience, that of Simeon to the Spirit: again, in three verses (from 25 to 27) the Spirit is mentioned three times, moving Simeon's steps towards the awaited Messiah. In this passage, the true protagonist is the Holy Spirit.

We can say that obedience to the Law moves the steps of the Holy Family towards the temple, and obedience to the Spirit moves those of Simeon. At that moment, in a certain sense, the ancient Law meets in a new way with the Holy Spirit and His Law. That is how the encounter and revelation happen.

Simeon has done nothing special, he has nothing to boast about, except that he has seen that God has been filled his promise to him. And he saw the salvation of the Lord.

He did not just see a child, he did not see the Christ of God; with the eyes of the Spirit, he saw that this Child, this Messiah, is the One who saves, is salvation.

In other words, Jesus, who is brought to the temple to be redeemed, is recognized as the One who will redeem His people and all nations, as the One who will bring ultimate salvation. For all, this Messiah will be a light.

It was the Spirit who enabled Simeon and then the prophetess Anna to see what the crowd in the Temple could not notice. It is the Holy Spirit who allows us to see the salvation that is happening, that is, which allows us to go beyond what the eyes of the flesh can see, and to grasp the profound meaning of these events.

This will not be easy. Salvation will pass through hostility and rejection: it will be a costly suffering. Immediately announced as a salvation for all, it also becomes a

sign of contradiction, a reason for rejection. "Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed—and a sword will pierce your soul as well." (Lk 2:34-35).

Because in front of Jesus, it will be necessary to take a position, to take sides: for those who do not welcome him, he will be an obstacle, and for those who welcome him, he will be resurrection and life.

Simeon and Anna teach us the meaning of waiting, of respecting God's time, the time of others, the meaning of vigilance, of knowing how to look at the reality of the world with the eyes of the Spirit, which opens us to hope, because it makes us capable of grasping the signs of salvation that are visible in the ordinary life of each of us.

Yes, in this increasingly complex world, in our respective societies that seem to be more and more divided and aggressive, in this Church of ours, whose voice seems to be that of someone crying out in the desert, God's plan is being fulfilled. Let us not be frightened by the fears of the world, but let us be guided by the Spirit to grasp the seeds of the kingdom that slowly grows. We do not want to be like the crowd in the temple, unable to grasp the signs of God's presence.

Jesus said: "When the leaves of the trees have already sprouted, you can see for yourselves that summer is near. When you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near" (Lk 21:30-31).

He asks us to know how to grasp the signs of the presence of the Kingdom in our world, in our time. He wants us to be like Simon and Anne, those who have experienced salvation and see it come true. Yes, even in our limited lives, in our weaknesses, in our contradictions, the Kingdom is fulfilled.

May the Spirit guide each of you and your community and give you the strength to see, day after day, with the eyes of the Spirit, the fulfillment of God's plan for you, for the people of Israel, and to be witnesses in and for the Church of the "light of the Gentiles and the glory of his people Israel."