

FÉNELON

ON THE PRESENTATION

THE PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE

TO-DAY Jesus is offered in the temple. The rule laid down for the children of men is followed by the Son of God. O divine Child, allow me to be presented with Thee. Let me be as Thou art in the pure hands of Mary and Joseph. Let me be a child and even a victim like Thee. Thy ransom is the same as that of the children of the poor. The price of Jesus is two doves. O immortal King, soon Thou wilt not have a place to lay Thy head. Thou dost enrich the world with Thy poverty; already Thou dost appear in the temple as a son of the poor.

Blessed are they who make themselves poor with Thee.
Blessed are they who have nothing and desire nothing.
Blessed are they who lose all possessiveness in Thee and
at the foot of Thy Cross;

Who no longer possess their own hearts,
Who have no will of their own,
Who are no longer their own.

This is rich and blessed poverty, a treasure unknown to the worldly. This emptiness is more than all the world's splendour.

Infant Jesus, I long to strip myself of everything and give it all to Thee, especially my heart—even to my smallest wish and least wilfulness.

It is difficult to understand but it is true none the less that we are separated from God until we throw off self and become lost in Him. The *I* of human nature which has always ruled must be for ever abolished.

Lord, teach me detachment so that I shall not turn again to self-love and eager longings. Then I shall be able to say, 'Lift me up or cast me down. Let me be remembered or forgotten, praised or blamed.'

What will it matter whether I am trusted or suspected unjustly? whether I am at peace or disturbed? It will no longer be any concern of mine. I shall think less about myself and what happens to me than about

Him Who does all these things according to His pleasure. His will will be done and that is enough. If any *I* remains to complain, my sacrifice will be imperfect.

Self-renunciation means that the natural man must be gradually but relentlessly annihilated, and our human nature rises in revolt at the thought. Old attitudes and habits do not die easily. They revive again and again. 'The treatment I receive is unjust,' murmurs self, or, 'this accusation is false and unfair. My friend is unfaithful and ungrateful. I am overcome by the loss of my worldly goods. The absence of all sensible [cf. felt] solace is too bitter. This test that God puts me to is too severe. The good people from whom I expected help are curt and indifferent. God Himself seems to have rejected me and withdrawn from me.'

Well, weak and cringing soul, soul of little faith, do you not will what God wills? Are you His or your own? If you are still your own, you have reason to pity yourself and to cherish the things pleasing to you. But if you desire to belong to God Who would save you, why do you still listen to yourself? What is there left to say in favour of the unhappy *I* you have renounced utterly and for ever? Let every support be taken from him, so much the better. This is the substance of true sacrifice; the rest is merely shadow. This is the only way the victim can be truly offered and God worthily adored.

O Jesus, with Whom I offer myself, give me the courage to renounce self utterly. Thou wert ransomed for two doves, but this did not save Thee from the sacrifice of the Cross. Thy presentation in the temple was the beginning and the first-fruits of Thy offering on Calvary. And so all the outward offerings I make Thee cannot ransom me. I must give myself completely, even to dying on the cross. To lose ease, fame, money, even life is nothing; we must lose ourselves in Thee.

We must become strangers to self and have no other interest but God's to Whom we belong.

—François de Salignac de la Mothe-Fénelon (1651–1715),
Archbishop of Cambrai, in his *Meditations and Devotions*, sel.,
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