

**Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14**

**Psalm 128 1-5**

**Colossians 3:12-21**

**Luke 2:22-40**

**We gather today within the octave of Christmas. The Church urges us to us to celebrate the octave, the eight days of Christmas. There is simply too much to celebrate on one day...it takes many more days to begin to take in what it means, what it is all about, and to begin to know the impact of Christ in our lives.**

**In the sacred word today it is easy to sense the grateful hearts of Anna, the prophetess, and Simeon, who awaited Jesus, “the consolation of Israel.” This moment in the Temple took Mary and Joseph by surprise. These two old folks, undoubtedly, were convinced that God’s promise of great freedom, great hope, has now been fulfilled. Mary and Joseph seemingly knew a great deal about their child...but still they were caught by surprise and were amazed.**

**Anna and Simeon represent the people who for centuries, one generation after another, lived in expectation, their minds and hearts inevitably focused on the future. The present moment was always empty of what will eventually come. And so, for these folks, there was never deep satisfaction, for they always felt some thing was missing. The unfulfilled promise robs today, no matter what is happening, the unfulfilled promise robs today of meaning and joy.**

**The angel’s announcement, few verses earlier in Luke’s account, ends this living for tomorrow and invites the shepherds, and indeed all of us to live “this day.” The “news of great joy” is that the time of waiting is over...fulfillment has arrived. The time of emptiness has become the time of fulness. Holding the child Jesus in his arms, the aged Simeon says, “God, you can now release your servant; release me in peace as you promised. With my own eyes I’ve seen your salvation; it’s now out in the open for everyone to see” (The Message). Simeon experiences the hope that drove his days. He waits for nothing more...for him time has reached a fulness, a completeness. The longing for tomorrow is over. Joy in today has replaced waiting and emptiness.**

**This is what we ponder on this seventh day of Christmas, a joy that tells us we have the fulness of God’s love in our midst...within the home...within the workplace...within the school...within the troubled neighborhood...within the world so prone to violence and war. I no longer need to look ahead and yearn for anything more. The fulness of love is in our midst. All we need do is open our eyes, open our hearts, and let Christ enter into this moment, this time of my life, your life.**

**More often than not we expect Christ to fix our broken families, our broken lives, our broken world. When all is not perfect we quickly revert to that old and ancient mode, longing and waiting, and forgetting Christ is present. We belong to this moment and there**

**is great meaning in this place and time, because Christ Jesus is with us in this moment and time.**

**I think it would be helpful to listen to the words of Simeon again, as he speaks to Mary in a kind of stage whisper. After he proclaims all the wonderful qualities he senses in this child Jesus, he looks over at her and says, “You know, this child is going to cause you a lot of pain. As wonderful as all of this is, it’s going to really cut into you and expose things you thought you would never see.” What it exposes is the folly of some of our illusions and some of our dreams and goals.**

**The Messiah did not come to make a wonderful and peaceful world for his mother. He was not going to take away all pain from her. No, there would be many things about his life that would cause her pain and pain for many of us. But the work for Mary, and for each one of us, is to embrace all of that with a certain trust and confidence and hope. The promise of God, the love of God is in our midst. We might look for the perfect family, the perfect world, the perfect work setting, and so forth, yet the presence of Christ in our midst helps us to make the very best of what we have been given!**

**My hope is that these words and reflections might help you ponder with curiosity the gift of Christ. We celebrate the Eucharist and begin the New Year with confidence, for Christ Jesus is in our midst.**