

02/02/14Presentation of Jesus A

- Fr. Chuck Ritter, who is now our diocesan administrator, recently told a story about one particular day when he was a young priest. It's a story I can easily relate to, because I've experienced similar things.
- He'd had a busy day and, among other things, had been to the hospital. It was late afternoon, and he was looking forward to dinner and a rare quiet evening. Then he got a call. The hospital needed a priest to anoint a sick man who'd just come in.
- After he got off the phone he literally complained to God: *Can't I have some time to myself?* And the answer came back, *No, you belong to me.*
- That sense of belonging to God was at the heart of the Jewish practice of ransoming firstborn sons by sacrificing a lamb or two young pigeons, as Joseph and Mary did when they took the baby Jesus to the Temple.
- The Chosen people remembered the story of their rescue from Egypt, when their firstborn sons were spared from the angel of death. They were God's people—they were not their own masters.
- Mary and Joseph recognized that Jesus was not their own. And, as they presented their son, it wasn't the priests who saw what was special in this little boy.
- It was an older man named Simeon and an 84 year old woman. They were the ones who saw that Jesus was significant for his people.
- Simeon gave us a short, beautiful prayer that we pray every night at Night Prayer. In fact, it's often the last words on my lips before I go to sleep: *Now, master, you can dismiss your servant in peace....*
- In our own parish, as in so many others, it's often the older men and women who are the backbone of so many activities. They

plan and often execute our fish dinners and breakfasts. They maintain our prayer chains and Eucharistic adoration days. Often they are the great financial contributors.

-- In a world that worships youth, we should appreciate their contributions. But we cannot neglect the many sacrifices made by younger persons as well.

-- Most of these sacrifices are for their families: deferring career opportunities to care for children, taking time to care for elderly and aging parents... just to name a couple of examples.

-- We should recognize these sacrifices as well, which are more valuable than the sacrifice of any animal or other material goods.

-- While we do so, we should realize that, in the end, we all belong to the Lord. Whatever sacrifice God asks of us is just and right because God has given us everything we have. It is all grace, an undeserved gift.

-- Sure, I know I've complained to God, thinking he was imposing on me, when I've been in situations similar to what Fr. Ritter recounted. I want to have time to myself, as most of us desire.

-- In the end, though, I belong to the Lord. And each of us who are baptized belongs to him as well.

-- Mary and Joseph recognized that they could not cling to Jesus. He was God's instrument. May we recognize our total dependence upon God, so we may be his effective instruments in the world.