



## **The high price of mercy, freely given**

**By Rachel Vala**

I've had my fair share of encounters with God's infinite love and mercy. The Father has been abundantly gracious to me and generous in scattering moments of grace in my life, particularly in times of hardship and difficulty. But it seems that just when I think I've finished learning about this mercy and love I am once again, humbly, plunged into the depths of it where God tenderly reveals more of His heart to me.

A few weeks ago, I attended a retreat with the Missionaries of God's Love who were, unironically, teaching us about God's love. The Kerygma. So simple... Or so I thought? "I know about God's mercy; I frequently visit the Sacrament of Reconciliation!", I told my small group. But the more we expanded on the idea of reconciliation, the more I became aware that my own sacrifices, my own atonements for sin, were largely my attempts to 'make right' my relationship with God. I had forgotten that nothing can 'make right' my relationship with God but God alone. Our sin causes a debt too huge for us to ever be able to pay off ourselves.

This week we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. This event we read about in Scripture and meditate upon in the Rosary is so theologically rich, full of wisdom and symbolism, it cannot but remind me of God's goodness. The Holy Family went, according to the Law of Moses, to present Jesus in the Temple. Unable to afford a sacrificial lamb, they presented instead the sacrifice of the poor, two turtle doves. Mind you, Jesus is God in the flesh and Mary was conceived without original sin – surely these purifying sacrifices were not necessary for them? How stirring, then, is their obedience to the Law, as people of Israel. Simeon, a man of God and filled with the Holy Spirit, saw the Holy Family and, moved in awe, was compelled to prophecy about the child Jesus' hold on salvation history.

The weight of this reality, that God provides salvation, was firmly pressed against my pride on my retreat. While atonement, fasting, attempts at self-mastery and sorrow for our sins are good and necessary things, no amount of self-chastisement or fasting can justify me in the presence of God. No turtle doves, no amount of 'following the law' can buy me pardon. Mercy is an expensive gift, but it's freely given.

Simeon cried, "My eyes have seen Your salvation, which You have prepared for all nations. A light to enlighten the pagans and give glory to Israel, Your people." Praise God! And praise Him for unceasingly stripping me of my blindness so that my eyes may see His salvation, too. His incalculable mercy has been given to everyone. "For my eyes have seen His salvation which He has prepared for ALL nations." I must note that it's not just for the righteous (or those who try to be). No number of turtle doves or lambs are to convince God for mercy. Jesus alone is the perfect sacrifice, the true Lamb of God who was slain, and His sacrifice is sufficient for all and forever.

“Now master you can let your servant go in peace, just as You promised.” Yes... How Simeon’s words resonate with me and echo in my heart. What a relief that God is enough for me and that He is who He is. May we find rest in His peace and walk in the light of His mercy.

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