



Living the Faith

A FRUITFUL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN YOUNG AND OLD

by Kelly Bothum

It's easy to fall into negative thinking when much of the conversation about raising children today seems to focus on everything that's going wrong in our families. We hear how it's so much harder now for parents to keep up with the demands at work and at home, how families are more fragmented than in the past, how myriad distractions keep us from connecting with our faith and each other.

How depressing. How dispiriting. How wrong.

Sure, we can lament the many less-than-ideal aspects of modern society, such as violent video games that trivialize—rather than promote—life, reality shows that glorify a sexualized lifestyle and the gotta-have-it-all consumerism that hastens our slide toward a disposable culture.

The other option is to do something about it. We have to ask how we play a role in all of this. We have to ask: What is our duty as elders in transmitting the values and faith we care about?

In 2014, in his homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, Pope Francis reminded us of the simple

In a Nutshell

There was a time when Christmas ended on Feb. 2 with the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, which made Christmas last for 40 days.

It makes sense that this feast was considered part of Christmas because the biblical basis is part of the infancy narrative in the Gospel according to St. Luke.

The Gospel reading for the feast begins with these words: "When the days were completed for their purification, according to the law of Moses, Mary and Joseph took Jesus up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord."

act of passing down our principles, including our lives of faith. He reminded us that the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is also called a "feast of encounter," and there are several encounters going on during the biblical events that took place when Mary and Joseph took their newborn son to the temple.

One encounter is of Jesus meeting his people, but there is also another encounter, the pope said, "between the young, who are full of joy in observing the law of the Lord, and the elderly who are full of joy in the action of the Holy Spirit. It is a unique encounter between observance and prophecy, where young people are the observers and the elderly are prophets."

The elders are Simeon, a pious man, and Anna, a prophetess. The pope says of them: "In short, these two elders are full of life! They are full of life because they are enlivened by the Holy Spirit, obedient to his action, sensitive to his calls."

I wonder, are we, as elders, enlivened by the Holy Spirit and obedient and sensitive to his calls? Do we show this to the young in our lives, to those who look to us for guidance in life and faith?

I think it was around 3 a.m. of the first night after giving birth to my oldest daughter when I realized that parenting, or being an elder in general, requires a vigilance unlike any other.

Everything we do in our lives offers our children and the children of others a lesson. Sometimes it's as obvious as reminding our children to look both ways before crossing the street or to say a prayer before going to bed, or as noble as taking time out of a busy life to volunteer a few hours a week at a soup kitchen.

Children observe and learn how we, as parents or elders, live the Ten Commandments, how we treat those who need our help. Sadly, they also learn



when we don't help the poor, when we don't act in charitable ways, or when we fail to follow the letter of the law.

Are we, like Simeon and Anna, who listened to the Holy Spirit, or like Mary and Joseph, looking to do what is right by the law? In the case of Mary and Joseph, the reason for the visit to the temple was to comply with a law and that certain zeal that new parents have to do everything right when a new baby comes along. Yet, it's also deeper than that.

The pope described Mary and Joseph as "two newlyweds, they have just had their baby, and they are motivated by the desire to do what is prescribed. This is not an external fact; it is not just to feel right, no! It's a strong desire, a deep desire, full of joy."

What's important, as people of faith, is to maintain this zeal to do things right, to live by God's laws with joy, but also to allow room for the Holy Spirit to inspire us, as he inspired Simeon and Anna.

Rather than lamenting about how bad the world has become or how great it used to be way back when, parents, and the young, need our help in the here and now. If it takes a village to raise a child, then the Church should be part of a community of believers, of elders, like Simeon and Anna, or Mary and Joseph, "animated by the (Holy) Spirit" with joy to do what's right.

As the pope reminded us: "It does good to the elderly to communicate wisdom to young people; and it does good to young people to receive this patrimony of experience and wisdom, and to carry it forward, not to keep it in a museum, but to carry it forward, facing the challenges that life presents; to carry it forward for the good of the respective religious families and of the whole church."

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