

Feast of the Holy Family, December 28
Sr. Ellen McDonald, MM, Panama

Sirach 3:2-6, 12-14; Psalm 128:1-2, 3, 4-5; Colossians 3:12-21; Luke 2:22-40 or 2:22, 39-40

This child is destined for the falling and the rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed.
– Luke 2:34

Like so many things in our consumer and media-driven society, Christmas can often emphasize the young. We even hear it said, “Christmas is for children.” Yet today we are called apart from glitter and toys to reflect on the “privilege of age.” The gospel tells how Mary and Joseph took Jesus to the Temple and there encountered a prophet and a prophetess, Simeon and Anna. Reference to their age highlights people who can look back at the history of their people and see far beyond.

As missionaries, many of us discover in the cultures we go to a pronounced and reverent respect for the elderly, “ancestors,” both living and dead. My own mission life was marked early on by the love, concern and patience of two elderly sisters, Eugenia and Mariana. They were not unlike Simeon and Anna, in that they were found daily in the church of the priestless parish in inner city Panama where I worked. They talked often about the early years of the parish, even as they fretted about the lives of aimless youth and unemployed adults in the depressed streets and desperately poor and overcrowded homes of the parish.

Perhaps I should have reflected more with them about Simeon and Anna and how it was that they saw the arrival of salvation in an infant. Were they graced with an insight into an understanding of salvation, God’s intervention in human history, as an on-going event? How do we recognize in the child Jesus “a light for revelation,” moving us “to praise God and to speak about this child to all who are looking for redemption?” Do we know the infant that had to grow, learn, change and even die to teach us how to realize salvation?

As we look back these days on the close of another year of human history, do we see more than wars without winners, environmental abuses and climate changes, economic collapses, growing numbers of poverty-stricken people, and other similarly sad situations?

The Gospel tells us today that we need to know Christ once more as “light for revelation.” We are being challenged to look back on history and see beyond the obvious to understand where and how God is or is not working in our world even now in unexpected ways and places. It is ours to search out and align ourselves with God’s work and make of our resolutions a new beginning of salvation.

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