Gracious God, help me to present myself completely dedicated to a holy life, just as your Son was presented and dedicated. Amen

A custom of the Jewish faith – in fact, part of keeping the covenant with God -- was that babies were brought to the Temple at a specific time to be presented to the Lord. In fact, the custom was even stronger in the case of first-born male children, like Jesus, who were to be fully dedicated to the Lord, unless “redeemed” by following a specific ritual and bringing a specific sacrifice. Mary and Joseph were observant Jews, who followed all the customs of their faith. They brought Jesus to the priest to be presented and to be fully dedicated to the Lord with no reservations and no attempt to redeem Him. They simply brought the sacrifice required for the presentation. And at that presentation Jesus was recognized as the Holy One He is, and welcomed into the Jewish community of faith, dedicated to God, set apart for the ministry into which He was born and into which He was called.

*In a few moments, Grace Pless will be presented to God under the customs of our faith, under the covenant we have with God as Christians through Jesus. She will be baptized and sealed as being one of Christ own forever. And, through the promises made on her behalf by her parents and grandparents, she will be dedicated to God and set apart for the ministry into which God called her and has gifted her.*

We all, by virtue of our baptism, whether as a child presented by our parents, or as an adult presented by ourselves, are holy -- dedicated to God and set apart for the various ministries into which God has called us and gifted us. All of us as baptized members of the community of faith have ministries that help others to see and understand the love of Christ. We do this ministry as part of our daily lives of family and work and household errands.

William Stringfellow wrote in Instead of Death: New and Expanded Edition, “Thus the vocation of the baptized person is a simple thing: it is to live from day to day, whatever the day brings, in this extraordinary unity, in this reconciliation with all people and all things, in this knowledge that death has no more power, in this truth of the resurrection. It does not really matter exactly what a Christian does from day to day. What matters is that whatever one does is done in honor of one’s own life, given to one by God and restored to one in Christ, and in honor of the life into which all humans and all things are called. The only thing that really matters is to live in Christ instead of death.[[1]](#endnote-1)”

When we are baptized, first and foremost we are affirmed as Christ’s own forever. That means that our selves and our lives are of immense value to God and that we honor God by living into all the potential of what God created us to be. As we grow and are nurtured into the faith by our parents, godparents, family members and our worshipping community, we also learn what it means to live into the truth of the resurrection. We learn to live into our Baptismal Covenant. We believe and live into the trust of a Triune God, continuing to learn more about God and to be in relationship with God. We continue in the fellowship of other believers (that means we come to church), we take Communion, we pray in our private lives and we pray the ancient prayers with the community of faith. We try our best to always live as Jesus did but we realize when we fall short we ask forgiveness and we trust that God will forgive us. We take our faith out into the world serving Christ in everyone we encounter, seeking to be reconciled to them, to reconcile them to each other and to God using whatever unique gifts God has given us. And we realize and act upon the realization that all people are created by God in God’s image – thus all of them are worthy of love. We seek justice for all people, especially those who have no voice, just as we know Christ did.

Christ was born holy and officially received as a holy member of a holy community when he was presented to God and received by God through the ministry of Simeon. Likewise *Grace and* all of us were born holy, because we are created in Christ’s image. We likewise are officially received as a holy member of a holy community when we are presented in baptism and marked as Christ’s own. As part of that holy life God calls us to bring Jesus to the world through all of our activities. God promises to always help us as we try to live into that call and to lift us up when we fall. Mostly importantly, God wants us to know that he loves us, has received us as His own and will never let us go.

Amen

1. William Stringfellow, Instead of Death, New and Expanded Edition, Wipf & Stock Publishers, (2004), quote found on <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/baptism?page=2>. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)