

02 February 2021

### **Writings: Character Defining**

*Simeon said to his mother Mary “This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel” (Luke 2:34).*

There are certain points in history that are turning points, whether for nations, parishes or individuals. When a nation goes to war, there is usually one battle where the tide turns leading to victory or defeat. In a parish facing a major crisis, there is a moment when the community unites behind a plan to overcome it or falls apart. During a rough patch, a married couple has to decide whether they are still committed to each other or go their separate ways. In a way, these turning points are character defining moments. They determine the kind of nation, parish or individual a community or person really is despite how it is perceived by others or itself.

In today’s Gospel, Simeon tells Mary that her son is “destined for falling and rising of many in Israel”. There were many Jewish people living around the time of Jesus who were looking for some kind of leader who would put things right for their community. Some desired a political leader like King David, who would raise an army, drive the Romans out of Israel and restore the nation to its former glory. Others wanted a religious leader who like an Old Testament prophet, who would draw the people back to God and end the corruption which existed among the religious elite. Another group sought an end time prophet who would signal the final age when God would return to reward the righteous and punish evildoers. None of these groups could have imagined the infant whose parents had come to the Jerusalem Temple to offer the sacrifice required by the Law was that leader.

Simeon, who was told by God he would live to see that individual, recognized the significance of the moment he held the child. It was the turning point of his life. Although he likely did not live long after the encounter, he shared this meaning of the experience with others and correctly predicted that everyone would have to make a choice about Jesus: either accept or reject that he was the leader who God sent and for whom the people waited. This decision would determine how they would be remembered in history. Individuals like King Herod, Pontius Pilate and the Jewish leaders who sought Christ’s death were powerful and either respected or feared at the time. Yet, as the divine plan unfolded through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, these people found themselves on the wrong side of History. Those like Simeon, Anna and the Eleven who had little wealth, power or social status at the time, were on the other side. Each individual makes a decision about Christ is the heart. What they decide is the turning point of their life and the defining moment of their character.

This Covid 19 pandemic is likely to be turning point in our history. It is true there have been plagues in the past and there will be more in the future. The reason it is a turning point is because it will be a character defining moment. What kind of world, country, community and parish are we? What kind of individuals are we? The answer to this question will be determined in the coming months and years. Do we allow our Covid 19 fatigue and desire to do what we want to possibly endanger the lives of others or do we have the perseverance to promote the common good by following the protocols? Do we look after those who have suffered economic hardship because of the pandemic when they lost their jobs or businesses and help them get back on their feet or leave it up to “market forces”? Do we protect the vulnerable in our society including those who risk exposure to the virus by stocking shelves in grocery stores or clean the rooms in Long Term Care facilities and get rewarded with low pay, no benefits and little job security, both now and after the crisis, or do we forget about strengthening social programs so we can cut taxes? Our answers to these questions will define our character for future generations and likely prove a turning point in the History of our world, country and personal lives.

Turning points with their character defining potential don’t happen very often. When they do, we need to ask ourselves on which side of History will we find ourselves.

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