



February 2, 2014

## Feast—Presentation of the Lord, “Candlemas”

*“...my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for the gentiles, and the glory of your people, Israel.” Luke 2:30-32*

Dear Friends;

There is an old adage that says “Children do not belong to us, they are only lent to us by God.” It may be for this sentiment that the law (Book of Deuteronomy) says that the first born son belongs to the Lord. Parents must go to the temple to offer sacrifice. By this offering the parents “purchase back” their child.

Joseph and Mary are a pious and observant Jewish family. As required forty days after the birth of Jesus, they go to the temple so Mary can be ritually purified. And they come to present the child Jesus to make an offering for their son. The law stipulated that a lamb be offered. However, as poor folk they could offer instead a pair of birds.

The irony is that Jesus will be the perfect lamb of sacrifice that will purify God’s people. This fulfills the expectation of Malachi (3:1-4), “And suddenly will come to the temple the Lord whom you seek...he will purify the sons of Levi (priests)...that they may offer due sacrifice to the Lord...then the sacrifice will please the Lord.” And as our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews tells us, Jesus is not only the sacrifice (gift) he is also the high priest who offers the gift.

Now Joseph and Mary have come to offer sacrifice for this child. But the deeper reality is Jesus’ self-gift for us is the only sacrifice anyone will ever need. We have been purified and our lives have been restored forever.

When Joseph, Mary and the child come into the temple area they encounter a couple of elders—Simeon and Anna. They, like all the people of Israel, have been waiting in hope their whole lives. What did they see? Was it a light in the eyes of the parents? Maybe there was radiance in the face of the baby? Whatever it was, all their lives were changed in a flash. This child fulfills all their hopes. A new light has dawned. Simeon and Anna are witnesses to this light.

In many ways this story parallels the stages of our life and faith. The child Jesus represents the hope and promise as we begin. Who are we? How will our light shine? Joseph and Mary are like the middle part of our life. We recognize the gift of life and light we have been given. The challenge for us is to nurture and protect the gifts of grace we have received. Simeon and Anna represent the last stage where we look back on all the years. We see how the light has kept us going forward. We witness to that light. We encourage others to see the light in their own lives.

Today, forty days after Christmas, we recall that Jesus is a light for all. As a sign of that, we bless candles that we will use throughout the year in the church. We also begin the liturgy by everyone holding a lit candle. This light recalls baptism through which we have been enlightened by Christ. There is an old European custom that the candles that are blessed this day were taken home. They were lit whenever there was a storm. The light reminded them that Christ was with them. And as we go through the storms of our life let us never forget that Christ is the light that has overcome the darkness. Oh Christ, ever be our light!

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*