

The Paper Pulpit

(Reflections from the Pastor)

Presentation of the Lord

In the U.S., Groundhog Day is celebrated on February 2nd. But today is also the Feast of the Presentation. There are several things which we should know about today's gospel passage.

1. **First** of all, it commemorates the fortieth day after Christmas when the law of Moses prescribed that the first-born son in every Jewish family was consecrated to the Lord.
2. **Secondly**, it actually concludes the celebrations of the Nativity, even though ordinary time began on the day after we commemorated the Baptism of the Lord a few weeks ago.
3. **Third**, it is the feast which is also called **Candlemas**, on which the church has traditionally blessed all of its candles. The candles represent Christ as the light of the world.
4. **Fourth**, it has definite paschal overtones: the recognition of Christ as Light is a prelude to the acclamations which are included in the Easter Vigil service.
5. **Fifth**, this feast takes precedence over the fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time when it falls on a Sunday.

Joseph and Mary were the faithful parents who kept the law of Moses. They did not believe themselves to be above the law of God (how many parents today think they are above the religious laws), even though their son was the Son of God, just as Jesus himself carefully fulfilled the requirements of the law. Mary's role in all the infancy narratives is a prominent one as Mother of the Savior, and yet hers is such a self-effacing role, wherein she lets her son shine forth for all to see. She is the epitome of all women who define themselves through their children. In Luke's narrative, Mary represents all who hear the Word of God and keep it. Just as Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart, so must we take the Word of God and ponder it in our hearts. Mary offers her son to us, as she did to Simeon, so that we, too, may take him as our own. Since Jesus is no longer in the flesh, he can only take flesh through us; we must take him into our hearts and give him flesh and blood here and now. We must all be able to say "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal. 2:20).

Simeon represents all the just of Israel who hoped to see the Holy One of God. Furthermore, Simeon represents all of us. Simeon's canticle is spoken for all who have taken Christ into their hearts. Once we have taken him into our hearts, then truly we can depart in peace. Anna, an elderly woman, serves a very practical purpose as the second witness to Simeon's proclamation, as required in the book of Deuteronomy. But it is also interesting to note here the juxtaposition of the youth of Jesus and the old age of both her and Simeon. We so often push the elderly away from us as unwelcome reminders of our own advancing age. And yet, here Luke gives these two elderly persons a prominent role to play, one which highlights their wisdom. Rather than something to be avoided, age brings us all closer to our own encounter with Jesus for which this life prepares us.

When Joseph and Mary went to the temple, they only provided two pigeons as an offering because they could not afford a lamb, as would ordinarily be required. The purpose of the offering of a lamb and a pigeon, or two pigeons for those who could not afford a lamb, was in essence to purchase the first-born male child back from God. Each first-born son was believed to be a gift from God on loan to the parents. Since God had saved their first-born sons from pharaoh in Egypt through the blood of a lamb, now every first-born son must be purchased from God through the offering of a lamb. It is significant to note the lamb offered to purchase the child back from God on this feast would later become the spotless lamb, Christ himself on the cross, who would purchase our souls for God. Presented in the temple by his parents, Jesus would be back in Jerusalem to spend the last days of his ministry (cf. Luke 21:37-38) before fulfilling his path of death and resurrection.

The light of Candlemas announces the light of the paschal candle. Its brilliance, which shines for all nations, helps us to discover the true face of every human being in which we must recognize the face of Christ, in whose image all have been created. We are not the source of the light. But when the light of Christ shines into our life, then we can reflect that light into some other life, or into some dark situation that cries out for the redemptive light and love of God.

Just like Simeon did, we must take Jesus into our arms and welcome him into our hearts. And just as Simeon did, we must be able to see Jesus when no one else recognizes him. We must see Christ in others, even when they do not see him in themselves, so that they too can come to believe in their own goodness.

Fuel: For anyone using propane it has been a tough winter. We need to keep in our prayers all those who have been affected by the cold winter. If you or someone you know can't pay for their fuel, please let me know. I'll try to get them some assistance through our parish Works of Charity Account.

How much fuel do you think St. Max's uses in the winter? When it is extremely cold, we can use up to 500 gallons of propane in a week (that is not counting the fuel used at the old St Pat's Church and rectory). At \$4.00 a gallon we could spend \$2,000 a week in fuel. That is more than triple what we budgeted for. We have reduced the temperatures greatly (50's) and reduced the occupied time to minimum to help reduce fuel need.

If you are in a position to make an additional contribution to the church to help pay the cost of fuel, please put your donation in an envelope and mark it "fuel." Please put your envelope number on the envelope so you can get credit. Since we have other bills as well, please only do so as an "extra" contribution.

Thank you and Sincerely in Christ, Fr. Jim Trempe