

## **Candlemas Day February 2, 2011**

### **Be Light to the World**

Merry Christmas! The official Christmas season is just too short, so it is good to keep up Christmas decorations in church until today's Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. It's sad for me when I often see Christmas trees put out in the garbage on the day after Christmas. When I was a kid we kept up our Christmas decorations, or at least the nativity set, until Three King's day, for the twelve days of Christmas. And the Church's official season of Christmas is just a little bit longer—it ended on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. But today we end a period of forty days since Christmas. It commemorates the Jewish celebration when the first-born males were brought to the temple to be dedicated to God forty days after their birth. It was a custom based on the Passover when the first-born of the Egyptians were killed, but those of the Israelites were not. In thanksgiving, the Israelites were to offer their first-born to the Lord and then purchase them back by making sacrifice.

So today we remember how Jesus, the Temple of the New Covenant, was brought by Joseph and Mary to the temple of the Old Covenant. He was purchased back from God for a sacrifice of two pigeons. Mary and Joseph were obedient to the law even though their Son was God Himself.

Originally, today's feast was also called The Purification of Mary. Again this was based on Jewish custom where a woman who gave birth to a boy was ritually unclean for forty days. After forty days she was required to present herself to the priests and offer a sacrifice for her purification. Of course, the ever-Virgin Mary is for us the model of purity. She didn't need to be purified, but she was obedient to the law.

Today is also called Candlemas. And this derives from our gospel reading for today. Simeon took the child Jesus into his arms and said: ***“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in the sight of all the peoples: a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”*** Jesus is announced as the light to reveal God to the Gentiles, that is us, the non-Jews. And so the tradition began of blessing candles so that we could be witnesses and symbolically bring light to the world. I ran across an interesting quote attributed to Pope Paul VI. He said: ***“Christ himself says, ‘I am the light of the world.’ And we are the light, we ourselves, if we receive it from him.... But how do we receive it, how do we make it shine? ...[T]he candle tells us: by burning, and being consumed in the burning. A spark of fire, a ray of love, an inevitable immolation are celebrated over that pure, straight candle, as, pouring forth its gift of light, it exhausts itself in silent sacrifice.”*** Do we exhaust ourselves in silent sacrifice?

So today we celebrate the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. We celebrate the ritual Purification of Mary. We celebrate Candlemas. But today is also the 15<sup>th</sup> World Day for Consecrated Life. It is a day when those in consecrated life renew their vows. They rededicate themselves to the Lord on this very special feast.

For us, today is a day that we should also re-dedicate ourselves to the Lord and commit to following God's will according to our station in life and to being witnesses to the world; to being light to the world. In fact, tonight after Mass, we were to have twelve people make their Total Consecration to Jesus through Mary following the method of St. Louis de Montfort. With the weather, I'm not sure how many, if any, were able to make it. Jerry Roubal has been very active

in making this available at SS. Cyril & Methodius and the surrounding area, and my wife, Jenni, has also taken on spreading this consecration as part of her ministry as well.

Today is also a day to present our children in prayer to the Lord and ask that they be open to following whatever vocation God calls them to: the married life, the single life, the priesthood, or the consecrated life in a religious order. It is a good reminder to pray for vocations.

We have a lot of special feasts and celebrations to remember in the Church today. And, oh yeah, there is one secular one that may bring us some hope on this snowy day. The groundhog didn't see his shadow so that means spring is near. But I found an interesting old English song that pre-dates Groundhog Day and which was used to predict the weather. It conveys the same sentiment and goes like this:

*If Candlemas be fair and bright,  
Come winter, have another flight;  
If Candlemas bring clouds and rain,  
Go winter, and come not again.*

I now say Merry Christmas one last time until next year. Think Spring, and remember to bring the Light of Christ to the world.

**Deacon Joe Hulway**