

Candlemas 2020 SSP

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The feast of the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, also known as the Purification of Saint Mary the Virgin, also known by its nickname Candlemas, is forty days after Jesus's Nativity. This is according to the Law of Moses. According to that Law, the male child was to be circumcised on the eighth day (that would be January 1), and then presented with an offering in the Temple on the fortieth day, that would be today, February 2. It is worth noting that the Holy Family took the poor people's option on that offering, presenting two doves or pigeons. So with this feast, the Christmas cycle concludes.

The Presentation is a major feast of Christ which the Book of Common Prayer says supersedes a regular Sunday. That is why at Saint Stephen's the creche remains in place until February 2. It also means (this is my opinion here) that your Christmas thank-you notes are now late.

The scene in the Gospel is charming and symbolic. Two old people, Simeon and Anna, who were pretty much always in or around the Temple, took special note of the infant Jesus. The wonderful canticle, the Nunc Dimittis, which is said at Evensong, was first said by Simeon and penned by Saint Luke concerning the infant Lord.

There is a charming old text about this episode about Simeon as he took up the baby in his arms and praised him. The text says that the old man carried the young child; but the child governed the old man.

Mary, who also performed the rites of the Law for the mother of a newborn, together with Joseph and the others in the Temple, represents and personifies the Church, and this representation extends to this day. For what is it that we always have to present in the Temple of

the Church, including this beautiful Temple of Saint Stephen's? Is it not Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today and forever?

I began to realize how very important it is to understand the centrality of Jesus Christ is to the integrity of the Church's worship, ministry and mission, and also to **say it, and to repeat it**, at Saint Thomas Church in Manhattan, where I served as rector for 18 years. We had many services, twenty each week, and six of them were choral services. It was like a choral basilica on Fifth Avenue. Many people came to these – wanderers, lookers, seekers, inquirers, ranging from the unbelieving to the devout, of all shapes and flavors. It dawned on me, when welcoming all these people, to say, each time, Welcome in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Christ after all, who is the subject, the predicate, and the object of Christian speaking. The Church, whether we are speaking of the people or the buildings, belongs to Jesus Christ. So I always wanted to welcome all comers in his name; that is, to present Christ in his temple, and like our Lady Saint Mary, to purify things, including myself and my hearers, with the cleansing power of his name.

But I have come to see how relevant this welcome is everywhere. Not just in the big city on Fifth Avenue but here on College Hill and everywhere else, including my town of Narragansett at Saint Peter's-by-the-sea. Some Churches, some Christians, seemed to stammer or even be tongue-tied over the use of this sacred name of our Lord. Let it never be the case here! Above all in an Anglo-Catholic parish such as Saint Stephen's, everything is centered on Jesus Christ, with a reverent bow towards his mother Mary as the representative of the Church in its Christ-centeredness.

Today is the day of our Annual Meeting. I have a few more things to say, but not now or here; rather, in a few more words at that Meeting up in the Guild Hall. So for now, let us pray

that our Lord Jesus Christ will bless us with his presence here and upstairs, and in due course may in turn present us to his Father as disciples who try to do his will.

In the Name of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost. Amen.