



The **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord** occurs forty days after the birth of Jesus and is also known as **Candlemas Day**, since the blessing and procession of candles is included in today's liturgy. Founded by Pope St. John Paul II in 1997, it is the **World Day of Prayer for Consecrated Life**. He attached it to "Candlemas Day" because the consecrated men and women are to be the light in the world, imitating Jesus, the Light of the World. The World Day of Prayer is moved to the following Sunday to be celebrated in the parishes.

The previous (1962) liturgical calendar refers to this feast as the "Purification of Mary." This is known as a "Christmas feast" since it points back to the Solemnity of Christmas. Many Catholics practice the tradition of keeping out the Nativity crèche or other Christmas decorations until this feast day.

On February 2nd another secular tradition unfolds, **Groundhog Day**, known well to schoolchildren and adults alike. The fate of Spring hangs in the balance as a burrowing animal looks for its shadow. The tradition originated from a mix of ancient Celtic traditions, as well as celebrating Candlemas, and German weather folklore involving a badger or hedgehog, later adapted by German immigrants in Pennsylvania using the native groundhog.

First Mass Reading from the prophet *Malachi 3:1-4* gives us an important insight to understand profoundly the mystery of the Lord's Presentation in the Temple by Mary and Joseph, in accordance with the canons of Mosaic Law. The text, taken from the Prophet *Malachi* says, "I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me; and suddenly there will come to the temple: Lord who you seek" (Mal 3:1). From all the Gospels, we know that it is the Precursor, St. John the Baptist who was born 6 months before Jesus, that God sent to prepare His way.

Gospel from *Luke 2:22-40* introduces us to different people and events that in themselves provide numerous lessons and themes for further reflection. First of all, Mary and Joseph respect the Mosaic Law by offering the sacrifice prescribed for the poor: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Simeon and Anna were two venerable elderly people dedicated to prayer and fasting and so their strong religious spirit rendered them able to recognize the Messiah. In this sense we can see in the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple an extension of the 'Pro Orantibus Day' (For those who pray). The Church demonstrates its



gratitude to all those in the community that dedicate themselves in a privileged way to prayer, to those who have a particular religious vocation to the contemplative life. In the figure of the venerable Simeon, Jesus' presentation in the temple, also reminds us that prayer and contemplation are not just a waste of time or an obstacle to charity. Time could not be better spent than in prayer as true Christian charity is a consequence of a solid interior life. Only those who pray and offer penance, like Simeon and Anna, are open to the breath of the Spirit. They know how to

recognize the Lord in the circumstances in which He manifests Himself because they possess an ample interior vision, and they have learned how to love with the heart of the One whose very name is Charity.

The feast was first observed in the Eastern Church as "The Encounter." In the sixth century, it began to be observed in the West: in Rome with a more penitential character and in Gaul (France) with solemn

blessings and processions of candles, popularly known as "Candlemas." The Presentation of the Lord concludes the celebration of the Nativity and with the offerings of the Virgin Mother and the prophecy of Simeon, the events now point toward Easter.

"The specific liturgy of this Candlemas feast, the blessing of candles, is not as widely celebrated as it should be, except of course whenever February 2 falls on a Sunday and thus takes precedence. There are two ways to celebrate the ceremony, either the *Procession*, which begins at a 'gathering place' outside the church, or the *Solemn Entrance*, celebrated within the church." (From *Ceremonies of the Liturgical Year*)

Until 1969, the ancient feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, of Oriental origin, was known in the West as the **Feast of the Purification of Our Lady**, closing the Christmas Cycle. The feast has for long been associated with many popular devotional exercises. The faithful: (1) gladly participate in the processions commemorating the Lord's entry into the Temple in Jerusalem and His encounter with God, whose house He had come to for the first time, in place of licentious pagan events; (2) are sensitive to the actions of the Blessed Virgin in presenting her Son in the Temple, submitting to the Law of Moses in the rite of purification, the humility of Our Lady. Hence, February second has long been regarded as a feast for those in humble service. (Excerpted from *Directory on Popular Piety and the Liturgy*)

Theme of Light is secondary on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. We are well familiar with the beautiful symbolism associated with light. Light means Christ and the supernatural life of grace. The Church, responding to Simeon's words, "The Light for the enlightenment of the Gentiles," keeps a genuine "light feast." (The feast was instituted to supplant the pagan *Luperalia*, a licentious frolic featuring nocturnal torchlight parades. This explains why at the blessing of the candles and in the procession the celebrant and his ministers used to wear violet, the penitential color.)

Candles are blessed for liturgical use and are also distributed to the faithful. In homes they should be lighted on the occasion of family detentions, in times of storm, household crises, or other dangers; also at the Communion of the sick and at the administration of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The Church, moreover, wishes these candles to remind us of our baptismal candles; for the candles we held at baptism signified our heavenly adoption and our duties in the lay priesthood of Christ. Year after year we again receive a baptismal candle so that "with burning lamp" we may hasten to meet the Bridegroom when He comes for the heavenly nuptials.

Things to Do:

- Get candles blessed that you will be using on your home altar/prayer table this year. Candles for liturgical uses formerly were required to be primarily of beeswax, but post Vatican II the candles' exact composition is determined locally. For cleaner burning, longer lasting, and less pollutants, beeswax is still the best.
- Read Luke 2:22-35, the account of the presentation including the Canticule of Simeon.
- Meditate on the constant *fi* of Our Lady of Sorrows, who embraced the will of God even as Simeon predicted that a sword would pierce her heart.
- Read more about the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.
- Celebrate with traditional recipes, representing the sun, light, and prosperity. Common dishes include sweet or savory crepes, Candlemas cookies, or Strawberry Cream Crepes, alongside a candlelit meal.