

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
THIRD SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME (C)

26 – 27 JANUARY 2019



SUNDAY REFLECTION

You see on God's altar bread and a cup. That is what the evidence of your eyes tells you, but your faith requires you to believe that the bread is the body of Christ, the cup the blood of Christ ... If, then, you want to know what the body of Christ is, you must listen to what the Apostle tells the faithful: *Now you are the body of Christ, and individually you are members of it.* If that is so, it is the sacrament of yourselves that is placed on the Lord's altar, and it is the sacrament of yourselves that you receive.

You hear the words 'The body of Christ' and you reply 'Amen'. Be then, a member of Christ's body, so that your 'Amen' may accord with the truth ... Be then, what you see, and receive what you are.

(St. Augustine, Sermon 272)

STEWARDSHIP: The U.S. bishops' pastoral on stewardship reinforces today's reading from 1 Corinthians: "Because its individual members do collectively make up the Body of Christ, that body's health and well-being are the responsibility of the members – the personal responsibility of each one of us. We all are stewards of the Church."

Maimonides

"The Torah is truth, and the purpose of knowing it is to live by it."

READINGS FOURTH SUNDAY

Jer. 1:4-5, 17-19: The calling of the young Jeremiah as a prophet, chosen from his mother's womb, reminds us that even those who exercise a particular role in the designs of God, often encounter rejection, hostility and hardness of heart in those to whom they are sent.

Ps. 71:1-6, 15-17:

1 Cor. 12:31-13:13: St. Paul's beautiful hymn to love celebrates the theological virtues: hope that makes us both courageous and humble; faith that reveals to us that the desire to understand must also engage and commit us, and charity that guides us to love more than to judge.

Lk. 4:21-30: Like Jeremiah, Jesus was a prophet who faced opposition and rejection when He spoke the truth from God in His own time and place.

St. Athanasius

"He became what we are that He might make us what He is."

BLESSING CANDLES AND THROATS

Next weekend, at all Masses, we will conduct the blessing of throats and candles.

The blessing of the candles will take place immediately following the homily. All are invited to bring their candles from home that you would like to have blessed. Baskets will be available in front of the altar.

The blessing of throats will take place at the end of Mass for those who would like to participate.

PRESENTATION CANDLEMAS (BLESSING OF CANDLES) 2 Feb

The Feast of the Presentation, often called Candlemas, commemorates the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the presentation of Christ in the temple, which occurred 40 days after His birth as prescribed by the Jewish law. According to Mosaic law, a mother who had given birth to a boy was considered unclean for seven days. Also, she was to remain 33 days "in the blood of her purification."

Luke tells us, quoting Exodus 13:2, 12, that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem because every firstborn child was to be dedicated to the Lord. They also went to sacrifice a pair of doves or two young pigeons. This lowly offering showed that Mary and Joseph were likely poor. Once in the temple, Jesus was purified by the prayer of Simeon, in the presence of Anna the prophetess. Simeon, upon seeing the Messiah, gave thanks to the Lord, singing a hymn now called the *Nunc Dimittis*:

*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace,
your word has been fulfilled:
My own eyes have seen the salvation,
which you have prepared in the sight of every people:*

*a light to reveal you to the nations
and the glory of your people Israel.*

Simeon told Mary, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed." Simeon thus foreshadowed the crucifixion and the sorrows of Mary at seeing the death of her Son.

The name Candlemas is derived from the activities associated with the feast. It came to be known as the *Candle Mass*. In the Western Church, a procession with lighted candles is the distinctive rite. According to post Vatican-II discipline, (if possible) the beeswax candles are to be blessed somewhere other than where the Mass is held. Often your local parish will hand out candles, or you may bring your own, to be blessed before the procession. These may be saved for later use in your home. After an antiphon, during which the candles held by the people are lighted, there is a procession into the church. During the procession to the church, the *Nunc Dimittis* is sung, with the antiphon "Lumen ad revelationem" (Luke 2:32). This procession into the church for Mass commemorates Christ's entrance into the temple. Since Vatican II, the feast is reckoned a feast of the Lord (as opposed to a feast of Mary), and officially designated "The presentation of the Lord."

History

Egeria, writing around AD 380, attests to a feast of the Presentation in the Jerusalem Church. It was kept on February 14th. The day was kept by a procession to the Constantinian basilica of the Resurrection, with a homily on Luke 2:22-39. However, the feast had no proper name at this point; it was simply called the 40th day after Epiphany. This shows that the Jerusalem church celebrated Jesus' birth on the Epiphany Feast (as is common in some Eastern Churches today).

In regions where Christ's birth was celebrated on December 25th, the feast began to be celebrated on February 2nd, where it is kept in the West today. In 542, the Emperor Justinian introduced the feast to the entire Eastern Roman empire in thanksgiving for the end to a great pestilence afflicting the city of Constantinople. Perhaps this is when Pope Gregory I brought the feast to Rome. Either way, by the 7th century, it is contained in the Gelasianum Sacramentary. Pope Sergius (687-701) introduced the procession to the Candlemas service. The blessing of candles did not come into common use until the 11th century.

While some scholars have asserted that the Candlemas feast was developed in the Middle Ages to counteract the pagan feasts of Imbolc and Lupercalia, many scholars reject this, based on Medieval documents. While the feast does coincide with these two pagan holidays, the origins of the feast are based in Scriptural chronology. Some superstitions developed about Candlemas, including the belief that if one does not take down Christmas decorations by Candlemas, traces of the holly and berries will bring about the death of the person involved. In past times, Candlemas was sometimes viewed as the end of the Christmas season, although there doesn't seem to be strong evidence it was officially ever considered part of the Christmas season.

Candlemas Day was also the day when some cultures predicted weather patterns. Farmers believed that the remainder of winter would be the opposite of whatever the weather was like on Candlemas Day. An old English song goes:

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

Thus if the sun cast a shadow on Candlemas day, more winter was on the way; if there was no shadow, winter was thought to be ending soon. This practice led to the folklore behind "Groundhog's Day," which falls on Candlemas Day.

Today, the feast is still celebrated on February 14th in some Eastern Churches, including the Armenian Church, where the feast is called, "The Coming of the Son of God into the Temple." Most churches celebrate it on February 2nd.



ST. BLAISE (BLESSING OF THROATS) 3 Feb

Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

(Prayer from the Blessing of the Throats)

Very little is actually known about this early Christian martyr. What we do know is derived mostly from various traditions. His feast day is celebrated in the East on 11 February and in the West on 3 February. The first reference we have of him is in the medical journals of a court physician named Aëtius Amidenus, from the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century, where St. Blaise is mentioned as being called upon for treating objects stuck in the throat. All sources agree that St. Blaise was the Bishop of Sebaste in Armenia who suffered martyrdom under Licinius around 316 AD. Emperor Constantine had legalized the practice of Christianity in 313, but his co-emperor and ally, Licinius, who had agreed in legalizing Christianity, betrayed him and resumed persecuting the Church. Constantine defeated Licinius in 324. In accord with various traditions, St. Blaise was born into a rich and noble family who provided him with a Christian education. He was a physician before being elected and consecrated a bishop at a young age. It should be remembered that at that time the local community usually nominated a man to be a bishop based on his outstanding holiness and leadership qualities; hi

in turn was then examined and consecrated by other bishops with the approval of the Holy Father. Therefore, St. Blaise must have been a great witness of the Faith.

During Licinius' persecution Blaise experienced a call to live as a hermit in a cave outside of Sebaste, where he was known to heal sick and wounded wild animals.

Eventually he was discovered by hunters who were roaming the countryside capturing creatures to use in the amphitheater games. Blaise was taken to Agricolaus, the governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, and thrown into jail.

One legend has it that on his way to prison, Blaise commanded a wolf to release a pig belonging to a woman who begged for the holy bishop's help. She later brought candles to his cell so he would have light to read the Scriptures. While Agricolaus was reportedly impressed with Blaise's miracles, it didn't stop him from insisting that the bishop renounce his faith and when he wouldn't, the governor had him beaten, tortured with an iron comb (a tool used for combing wool), and beheaded.

As the manuscripts from Aetius Amidenus show, by the sixth century St. Blaise's intercession was being invoked in the East for illnesses related to the throat. By the 9th cent., the saint was also revered in Europe and went on to become one of the most popular saints in the Middle Ages, venerated as one of the "Fourteen Holy Helpers", a group of saints invoked as early as the 12th cent. In Germany and who are honored on 8 Aug. These included saints such as St. Christopher, St. Erasmus, St. Denis of Paris (headache and rabies), St. Barbara (lightning, fire, explosion and sudden and unprepared death), St. Erasmus or Elmo (colic and cramps), St. Catherine of Alexandria (philosophers and students and wheelwrights), St. Margaret (possessions and pregnancy), St. George (protector of soldiers), Sts. Achatius and Eustace (hunters), St. Pantaleon (tuberculosis), St. Giles (epilepsy, insanity, and sterility), St. Cyriac (demonic possession), St. Vitus (epilepsy), and St. Christopher (travelers). The German Dominicans promoted this veneration, particularly at the Church of St. Blaise in Regensburg (c. 1320). Churches were named for St. Blaise and altars were dedicated to him, even the Abbey of St. Blaise in southern Germany claimed to have some of his relics. Pope Leo IV is said to have presented relics of St. Blaise to Duke Wolfenus of Rheinau, Germany in 855, who brought them home from Rome with him. Other relics of St. Blaise are reported to be in Braunschweig, Germany, as well as in Paris.

In 971, in present day Dubrovnik, St. Blaise reportedly appeared to the city's inhabitants to warn them of an impending attack by the Venetians. Ever since, Dubrovnik has honored him as its patron. A statue of the saint stands over the entrance gate to the city and the cathedral there has an array of Blaise's relics.

One reason for St. Blaise's popularity arose from the fact he was a physician who cured, even performing miraculous cures. Thereby, those who were sick, especially with throat ailments, invoked his intercession.

In time, the custom of blessing the throats of the faithful developed, with priests holding two tapered candles — blessed the day before on Candlemas, Feb 2 — over the head or the throat while invoking the intercession of St. Blaise against any ailment of the throat and body.

It's an ancient custom of the Church to bless the sick, rooted in the ministry of Christ and his apostles. According to the *Pastoral Care of the Sick: Rites of Anointing and Viaticum*, the annual blessing of throats is a traditional sign of the struggle against illness in the life of the Christian.

While we invoke St. Blaise for his protection against any physical ailment of the throat, we should also ask his protection against any spiritual ailment – profanity, cursing, unkind remarks, detraction of gossip. St. James reminds us, “If a man who does, not control his tongue imagines that he is devout, he is self-deceived, his worship is pointless” (1:26) and later, “We use (the tongue) to say, Praised be the Lord and Father; then we use it to curse men, though they are made in the likeness of God. Blessing and curse come out of the same mouth. This ought not to be, my brothers!” (3:9-10). Therefore, may St. Blaise protect us from all evil, physical and spiritual, which may attack the throat. While ailments of the throat are the main thing for which St. Blaise is invoked in the West, he is also considered a protector against wild animals, a protector of cities and a patron of veterinarians, wool-combers and the wool industry.

NOVENAS

For the past four weeks we have praying The Novena For Life sponsored by the Knights of Columbus Council here at St. Stephen’s. Novenas are an old devotional practice in the Church and even though they are not as well publicized or understood as they once were many people still find them to be a worthwhile form of prayer. So, what exactly are they:

A novena is a formalized vocal prayer extended over a specific amount of time. Remember, vocal prayer is the kind of prayer where we use other people’s words to address God and to lift our hearts and minds to him. The “Our Father” is a vocal prayer, for example. St. Francis of Assisi’s famous “Make me an instrument of your peace...” prayer is a vocal prayer. You don’t have to say these prayers out loud to make them “vocal,” rather, you just have to give “voice” to (“voice” and “vocal” both come from the same Latin root: *voco, vocare*, which means to speak out or to call) the words of the prayer. We can recite the words of a vocal prayer in the silence of our hearts, or audibly. In either case, however, vocal prayers give us a channel for the desires and thoughts of our souls.

When we use this kind of prayer, we align our minds and hearts with the meaning of the words, giving God praise, renewing our faith and trust, asking him for things we need or desire, or all of the above. A good vocal prayer helps us connect with God. It also reinforces our Christian convictions: by giving words to good desires and expressions of love for God, we actually exercise those desires and that love, and when we exercise them they grow.

A novena is a vocal prayer, or series of vocal prayers, that you commit to praying over an extended period of time. These prayers are usually linked to a specific devotion (for instance, devotion to a particular saint) or liturgical celebration (a novena for Pentecost, for example). They are also very often linked to a specific intention that we are praying for – you can offer a novena as a way to petition God for a special grace, like the healing of a sick person or the conversion of someone who is far away from God. The words of the novena will reflect all of these factors. They will remind you of the meaning of the liturgical celebration, the virtues of a saint, or the goodness of God. And the combination of prayers will also, usually, give you a place to insert your personal petition.

It’s important to remember, however, that novenas are not magic formulas. They are prayers. They are one way we can enter into conversation with God.

Where did novenas come from?

The most common period of time during which we pray novenas is nine days. The word

“novena” actually comes from the Latin for “nine.” The nine-day period of prayer has its origin in the Book of Acts. After Jesus’ Ascension into heaven, the Apostles, the Blessed Virgin, and some of Christ’s other followers all “joined in continuous prayer” (Acts 1:14) for nine days, until the dramatic coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. We know it was nine days, because the Ascension happened forty days after the Resurrection (cf. Acts 1:3), and Pentecost was always celebrated fifty days after the Passover. The Resurrection happened the day following the Passover, so we can do the math: $50-40-1=9$. This period in which the fledgling Church “joined in continuous prayer” in anticipation of the promised coming of the Holy Spirit is the first “novena.” Through the centuries, the strict period of nine days has taken various forms, including the nine First Fridays devotions recommended by our Lord to St. Margaret Mary and linked to the devotion to the Sacred Heart. Sometimes you even find local traditions of thirty-day or three-day “novenas.”

Why would anyone pray a novena?

In general, we pray novenas for the same reason that we pray at all: because God deserves our praise, and because we need his grace. Novenas are prayers, and all the benefits that prayer always brings are also brought by novenas. This particular form of prayer, however, has some special characteristics.

First, they provide a channel for strong spiritual sentiments or desires. Sometimes, our souls are so full of sorrow, or anxiety, or hope, or thirst for holiness that it is hard for us to find the words to express ourselves. Novenas give us a vehicle for prayerful expression. A novena of prayer can be a powerful way to mourn the loss of a loved one, for example – a novena of Masses can be a beautiful way to commend their soul to God’s mercy. In a crisis, a novena can channel our apprehension in a positive way: entrusting our deeply felt needs to God through the intercession of a saint, for example. Novenas put clear parameters around deep spiritual sentiments, enabling us to have confidence that we are keeping them in harmony with God and his will. In this way, they provide true comfort to our souls; they assure us that we are “doing our part,” so to speak, in response to particular needs of our own or of others.

Second, they help us stay in synch with our spiritual family, the Church. By joining in the Novena for Life, for example, we unite ourselves to many other Catholic both members of the Knights but also members of their families as well as members of the parish which they attend who are engaged in the same prayer and intention. By praying a novena before a major liturgical celebration like Christmas or Pentecost we can prepare our souls to engage in that celebration more fruitfully, less superficially.

I hope these observations have helped you understand a little bit better this long-standing devotion in the Church. And maybe it will even motivate you to try it out for yourself. I would like to invite our other readers to share their favorite novenas, along with any relevant experiences they may have had through praying them.

PRAYERS

Workplace Prayer

My Heavenly father, as I enter this workplace I bring your presence with me. I speak your peace, your grace, your mercy, and your perfect order in this office. I acknowledge your power over all that will be spoken, thought, decided, and done within these walls.

Lord, I thank you for the gifts you have blessed me with. I commit to using them responsibly in

your honor. Give me a fresh supply of strength to do my job. Anoint my projects, ideas, and energy so that even my smallest accomplishment may bring you glory.
Lord, when I am confused guide me. When I am burned out infuse me with the light of the Holy Spirit. May the work that I do and the way I do it bring faith, joy, and a smile to all that I come in contact with today.

Prayer for the Feast of the Presentation

Almighty ever-living God, we humbly implore Your majesty that, just as Your Only Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh, so, by Your grace, we may be presented to You with minds made pure. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen

Heavenly Father, on this Feast of Candlemas (the Presentation of Christ), I recall the gift Mary and Joseph gave to the world by offering baby Jesus to You in the temple.

I offer up to You all the children in my family.

I place them into Your perfect will and I turn their futures over to You.

Help me to let go of my ideas of what they should do with their lives, and show me how to guide them into the purposes for which You created them. Help me to learn from the example of the Blessed Mother, whose heart was pierced by the sword of her Son's pain, how to always trust in Your plans. Holy Family, pray for us. Amen.

A Prayer to Saint Blaise

O glorious Saint Blaise, who by thy martyrdom didst leave to the Church a precious witness to the faith, obtain for us the grace to preserve within ourselves this divine gift, and to defend, without human respect, both by word and example, the truth of that same faith, which is so wickedly attacked and slandered in these our times. Thou who didst miraculously restore a little child when it was at the point of death by reason of an affliction of the throat, grant us thy mighty protection in like misfortunes; and, above all, obtain for us the grace of Christian mortification together with a faithful observance of the precepts of the Church, which may keep us from offending Almighty God. Amen.

UP-COMING SCHEDULE

Saturday 26 Jan	Mass 8:30 a.m. Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Vigil Mass for 3rd Sunday Ordinary time 5:00 p.m. CAST
Sunday 27 Jan	Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. 7:00 p.m. Brig CAST
Monday 28 Jan	Day Off Mass 8:30 a.m. Brig 7:40 p.m. CAST
Tuesday 29 Jan	Mass 8:30 a.m. Meeting with Education Staff CAST

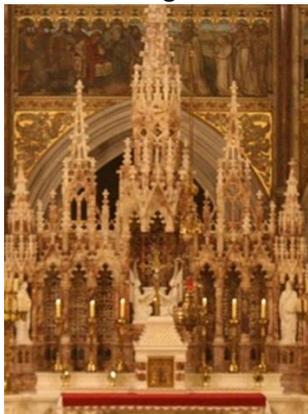
Wednesday 30 Jan Mass 6:30 a.m. 8:30 a.m.
 Confessions 7:00 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.
 PCRS Mass 10:00 a.m.
 Indian Creek Correctional Facility 5:30 – 9:00 p.m.

Thursday 31 Jan Mass 8:30 a.m.
 First Reconciliation 4:30 p.m.- 6:30 p.m.00 p.m.
 Mass 6:30 p.m.
 Teaching Mass RCIA

Friday 1 Feb First Friday
 Mass 8:30 a.m.
 Spiritual Direction 11:00 – 3:00
 KoC Adoration/Benediction for Life 6:30 p.m.
 Mass 7:30 p.m.

Saturday 2 Feb Mass 8:30 a.m.
 First Reconciliation 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
 Confessions 1:30 – 4:30 p.m.
 Vigil Mass 4th Sunday Ordinary time 5:00 p.m.
 Blessing of candles at Mass
 Blessing of Throats after Mass

Sunday 3 Feb 4th Sunday Ordinary Time
 Masses 7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. 5:00 p.m. Brig 7:00 p.m.
 Blessing of candles during Mass
 Blessing of throats after Mass



O God, and what joy ought not we men
 to conceive, what hopes and what
 affections, in knowing that in the midst
 of our land, in our churches, near our
 houses, the Holy of holies, the true God,
 dwells and lives in the Most Holy
 Sacrament of the Altar!
 -St. Alphonsus Liguori

Eucharistic Virtue