



### SUNDAY REFLECTION

Today's Feast, which marks the end of the Christmas season [in the old liturgical calendar], is a feast both of Jesus and of Mary: of Jesus, because He is presented by His Mother in the Temple forty days after His birth, according to the requirements of the law; of Mary, because she submits herself to the rite of purification.

The liturgy celebrates, primarily, the entrance for the first time of the Infant Jesus into the Temple: *"Behold the Lord, the Ruler, cometh into His holy Temple: rejoice and be glad, O Sion, and hasten to meet your God"* (Roman Breviary). Let us, too, go to meet Him, emulating the holy sentiments of the old Simeon who *"came by the Spirit into the Temple"* (Gospel: Luke 2:22-32), and filled with joy, received the Divine Child into his arms.

In order to celebrate this event more fittingly, the Church today blesses candles and gives them to us; with burning tapers, we enter the Temple in procession. The lighted candle is a symbol of the Christian life, of the faith and grace which should shine in our soul. It is also the image of Christ, the light of the world, *"a light to the revelation of the Gentiles,"* according to Simeon's canticle. The lighted candle reminds us that we must always bear Christ in us, the source of our

life, the author of faith and grace. By His grace, Jesus Himself disposes us to go to meet Him with livelier faith and greater love. May our meeting with Him today be particularly intimate and sanctifying!

Jesus is taken to the Temple to be offered to the Father, although, being God, He was not subject to the prescriptions of the Jewish law as were the other firstborn of the Hebrews. He is the Victim who will be immolated for the salvation of the world. His presentation in the Temple is, so to speak, the offertory of His life; the sacrifice will be consummated later, on Calvary. Let us offer ourselves with Jesus.

**STEWARDSHIP:** When Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple, they offered a sacrificial gift “in accord with the dictate in the law of the Lord.” An offering of a specific size or kind is not “dictated” when we bring our gifts to the altar at Mass. Is my gift reflective of the many blessings I have received?

## READINGS FOR THE FIFTH SUNDAY

9 FEB '20

**Is. 58:7-10:** true religion is never found in ritual alone, but always embodied in works of justice and compassion.

**1 Cor. 2:1-5:** The power of Paul’s preaching comes not from clever arguments, but from his witness to the revelation of God’s love in the One who was crucified.

**Mt. 5:13-16:** Jesus here describes the qualities of the real disciple. Both God’s message and His messengers must be immediately recognizable. It will be impossible to conceal the light that is in them if that light is allowed to shine out, just as unspoiled salt is immediately recognizable to the sense of taste.



## FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION

On February 2nd a quaint tradition unfolds, known well to schoolchildren and adults alike. The fate of Spring hangs in the balance as a burrowing animal looks for its shadow. But where did this tradition come from?

Groundhog Day has its roots in the ancient Christian tradition of Candlemas, when clergy would bless and distribute candles needed for winter. The candles represented how long and cold the winter would be. Germans expanded on this concept by selecting an animal—the hedgehog—as a means of predicting weather. Once they came to America, German settlers in Pennsylvania continued the tradition, although they switched from

hedgehogs to groundhogs, which were plentiful in the Keystone State, for the uninitiated Pennsylvania.

On February 2, 1887, Groundhog Day, featuring a rodent meteorologist, was celebrated for the first time at Gobbler's Knob in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania. Yes, God's Country. According to tradition, if a groundhog comes out of its hole on this day and sees its shadow, it gets scared and runs back into its burrow, predicting six more weeks of winter weather; no shadow means an early spring.

Just to set the record straight, in 1887, a newspaper editor belonging to a group of groundhog hunters from Punxsutawney called the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club declared that Phil, the Punxsutawney groundhog, was America's only true weather-forecasting groundhog. The line of groundhogs that have since been known as Phil might be America's most famous groundhogs. However, there are imitations, the best form of flattery, other towns across North America now have their own weather-predicting rodents, from Birmingham Bill to Staten Island Chuck to Shubenacadie Sam in Canada.

Candlemas became linked to weather predictions about the end of winter because of an old English poem:

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

It makes sense that early February was a good time to prognosticate about the weather, especially as February 2<sup>nd</sup> marks the midpoint between Winter and Spring. And the English poem appears to be the source of the shadow connection: "fair and bright" = sun = shadows = more winter, while "clouds and rain" = no sun = no shadows = spring arriving soon. It seems counterintuitive (why should a sunny day mean *more* winter?), but this is the exact pattern that Groundhog Day follows.

Now to get serious; the date of Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation, is always February 2<sup>nd</sup> because it is exactly 40 days (inclusive) after Christmas on December 25<sup>th</sup>. The Mosaic law stated that 40 days was the period of purification after the birth of a child, and so the presentation took place 40 days after Jesus was born. Incidentally, February 2<sup>nd</sup> is also halfway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, so the date has always had significance for ancient people.

The various names, meanings, and traditions overlapping in today's Feast present various facets of the event that is being celebrated. The Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is also seen as the Purification of Mary, or the Meeting of the Lord in the Christian East. It is also understood as Candlemas, marking forty days after Christmas, the end of that Liturgical season. The multiple names and meanings of today's Feast have given rise to surprisingly broad and varied cultural expressions. The biblical account of the Presentation is the source for the "two turtle doves" in the carol "The Twelve Days of Christmas," for the sword piercing Mary's Immaculate Heart in Catholic iconography, for the Fourth Joyful Mystery of the rosary, and for the Canticle prayed by all the world's priests and nuns every single night of their lives. the Presentation is

even the remote source of the frivolous American folkloric tradition of Groundhog Day as we saw earlier.

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. "In obedience to the Old Law, the Lord Jesus, the first-born, was presented in the Temple by his Blessed Mother and his foster father. This is another 'epiphany' celebration insofar as the Christ Child is revealed as the Messiah through the canticle and words of Simeon and the testimony of Anna the prophetess. Christ is the light of the nations, hence the blessing and procession of candles on this day. In the Middle Ages this feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, or 'Candlemas,' was of great importance.

Behind all of the various names and meanings associated with the Feast are, however, a few fundamental theological facts worth reflecting upon. The Lord Jesus Christ, forty days after His birth, in keeping with the biblical significance of the number forty and with Jewish custom, was presented in the temple in Jerusalem by His parents, Mary and Joseph. Saint Luke's Gospel recounts the story. After the Presentation, Jesus was to enter the temple again as a boy and later as an adult. He would even refer to His own body as a temple which He would raise up in three days. Jesus's life was a continual self-gift to God the Father from the very beginning to the very end. His parents did not carry their infant Son to a holy mountain, a sacred spring, or a magical forest. It was in His temple that the God of Israel was most present, so they brought their son to God Himself, not just to a reflection of Him in nature.

The extraordinarily beautiful temple in Jerusalem, the very building where Jesus was presented by His parents, was burned and destroyed by a powerful Roman army under the future Emperor Titus in 70 A.D. It was never rebuilt. A tourist in Rome can, even today, gaze up at the marble depictions of the sack of the Jerusalem temple carved on the inside vaults of the Arch of Titus in the Roman Forum. Christianity has never had just one sacred place equivalent to the Jewish Temple or the Muslims' Kaaba in Mecca. Our faith is historical, yes, but it has a global reach which does not allow it to be planted in just one culture or just one location. Christ is destined for all cultures and all times. Every Catholic Church with the Blessed Sacrament is a Holy of Holies, which fully expresses the deepest mysteries of our faith. There is no strict need to go on pilgrimage to Rome or to Jerusalem once in your life. But you do have to go on pilgrimage to your local parish once a week for Mass. Every Catholic Church in every place, not just one building in one place, encompasses and transmits the entirety of our faith. God's hand must have been involved in the headship of the Church migrating from Jerusalem to Rome in the first century. Our Pope does not live in the historical cradle of the faith he represents, because Saint Peter saw no need to remain in Jerusalem in order to be faithful to his Master. The Church is where Christ is, Christ is in the Holy Eucharist, and the Holy Eucharist is everywhere.

We go to church, as the Jews went to their one temple or to their many synagogues, because God is more God in a church. And when we experience the true God, we experience our true selves. That is, we are more us when God is more God. God is interpreted according to the

mode of the interpreter, when He is sought in a glowing sunset, a rushing waterfall, or a stunning mountain. In nature, God is whoever the seeker wants Him to be. In a church, however, God is protected from misinterpretation. He is surrounded and protected by His priests, saints, sacraments, music, art, and worship. In a church, God is fully clothed, equipped, and armored. He can't be misunderstood. So we go to find Him there, to dedicate ourselves to Him there, and to receive Him there in His Body and in His Blood.

*Lord Jesus, as an infant You were brought to the temple by Your parents out of religious duty. Help all parents to take their duties to God seriously, to inculcate their faith in the next generation by their words and by their actions, so that the faith will be handed on where the faith is first learned—in the family and in the home.*

"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 of celebrating the ceremony, either the *Procession*, which begins at a 'gathering place' outside the church, or the *Solemn Entrance*, celebrated within the church."

### **FEAST OF ST. BLAISE:**

Growing up in Western Pennsylvania in the 50's and 60's fresh fish was not within the grocery budget even if it was available. Instead Friday dinners rotated among items such as tuna casseroles, macaroni and cheese, and potatoe pancakes. My experience with fish left me with the impression that fish was usually square or rectangular or when white fish fillets made an appearance at our table my piece was filled with bones. So I resonated with the story of St. Blaise.

Little is known of St. Blaise's life; he was perhaps the bishop of Sebaste in the 4<sup>th</sup> century who died a martyr for the faith. The story of St. Blaise that captured my imagination was that while he was in prison facing martyrdom a mother brought her son to the bishop with a fish bone stuck in his throat. St. Blaise prayed and the young boy was healed. There are other stories as well: during the persecution of Licinius, St. Blaise, receiving some divine command, moved from the town, and lives as a hermit in a cave. Wild animals visited, and he healed any that were sick and wounded. One day, a group of hunters gathering wild beasts for the games in the amphitheater discovered St. Blaise and seized him. As he was being taken to the governor Agricolaus, the governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, St. Blaise encountered a woman whose pig was being seized by a wolf, St. Blaise commanded the wolf to release the pig, and it was freed unharmed.

As I was growing up, the principal message of the story of St. Blaise, unfortunately, seemed to be, "watch out for bones when you eat fish." And here I am now almost seven decades later, it reminds me that the stories we tell of the saints and blessed have an enduring power to them, a way of engaging our imaginations. St. Augustine wrote that we remember the particular deeds of the saints and martyrs "to excite us to imitate them and to obtain a share in their merits, and the assistance of their prayers."

St. Augustine's commentary challenges me to think beyond the assistance that St. Blaise may offer me or what merits he might be inclined to share with me, and to wonder in what way a Catholic pastor of a suburban parish might be moved to imitate a fourth-century bishop. What is there in St. Blaise's life that could excite me to similar feats of

virtue?

In the many miracle tales told of St. Blaise, from the healing of the young boy to the return of a widow's stolen pig, he looks for help from God, not only for the situation in front of him, but for the broader world. His prayers were always simultaneously for the here and now and the people of God in difficulties in every place and time. I'm quick to pray for the health and safety of those nearest and dearest to me, but do I remember to pray for those of passing acquaintance or totally unknown to me? In asking for healing for a relative or member of the parish, do I think to pray for the elderly who suffer with chronic pain?

I still get my throat blessed each year at this time. No longer terrified of choking on a fish bone — hoping that St. Blaise would notice the prayers of one small boy in a town far away in time and space — I find now in the crossed candles and Triune blessing more than an assurance that God is concerned with our worries (even if they are as irrational as mine over stray fish bones). God's grace spills over, reaching beyond the needs of one to all His people until the end of time.

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 or 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.

## **ORDINARY TIME**

We usually associate with the word ordinary the meaning that something is not special or distinctive. Because of this, if we really give it any thought the title Ordinary Time seems to refer to parts of the Church's Liturgical Calendar as being unimportant. Even though the season of Ordinary Time makes up most of the liturgical year. Add to this, the fact that Ordinary Time is those periods that fall outside of the major liturgical seasons just reinforces this impression. The rhythm of the liturgical seasons reflects the rhythm of life — with its celebrations of anniversaries and its seasons of quiet growth and maturing.

Ordinary Time, meaning ordered or numbered time, is celebrated in two segments: from the Monday following the Baptism of Our Lord up to Ash Wednesday; and from Pentecost Monday to the First Sunday of Advent. This makes it the largest season of the Liturgical Year.

### **Why is Ordinary Time called Ordinary?**

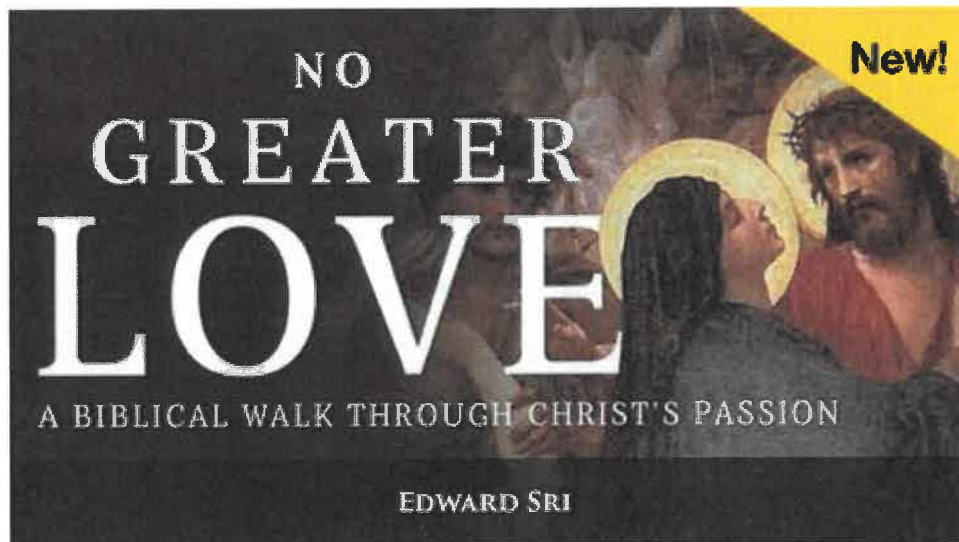
Ordinary Time is called "ordinary" not because it is common but simply because the weeks of Ordinary Time are numbered. The Latin word *ordinalis*, which refers to numbers in a series, stems from the Latin word *ordo*, from which we get the English word order. Thus, the numbered weeks of Ordinary Time, in fact, represent the ordered life of the Church — the period in which we live our lives neither in feasting (as in the Christmas and Easter seasons) or in more severe penance (as in Advent and Lent), but in watchfulness and expectation of the Second Coming of Christ.



It's appropriate, therefore, that the Gospel for the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time, which is actually the first Sunday celebrated in Ordinary Time, always features either John the Baptist's acknowledgment of Christ as the Lamb of God or Christ's first miracle – the transformation of water into wine at the wedding at Cana.

Therefore for Catholics, Ordinary Time is the part of the year in which Christ, the Lamb of God, walks among us and transforms our lives. There's nothing "ordinary" about that.

## LENTEN LESSONS



Once again we will have the usual soup supper along with a presentation and group discussion during the season of Lent beginning Thursday 27 Feb. This year the program will be centered on "No Greater Love A Biblical Walk Through Christ's Passion" presented by Dr. Edward Sri.

Filmed on location in the Holy Land, *No Greater Love* is a biblical pilgrimage that reveals Christ's amazing love for us. Best-selling author Edward Sri guides you through the last hours of Christ's life. You will walk step-by-step with Jesus from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Mount of Calvary. Every step of the way, Old Testament prophecies, messianic expectations, biblical symbolism, and historical context shed light on the mystery of Christ's suffering and death. With these insights, Catholics can come to a deeper understanding and appreciation of God's immeasurable and unconditional love for drawing closer to Jesus than ever have before. The program will consist of sessions:

1. The Prayer of the Agony: Jesus in Gethsemane 27 February 7:00 p.m.
2. "Are You the Christ?" (Mk. 14:61) Jesus' Arrest and Trial Before the Sanhedrin 12 March 7:00 p.m.

3. The Trial Before Pilate: Jesus is Condemned to Death  
19 March 7:00 p.m.
4. The Death of the Messiah: Jesus Carries His Cross. Is Crucified,  
and Dies 26 March 7:00 p.m.
5. The Seven Last Words: Jesus the Teacher at Calvary

## PRAYERS

### Prayer on the Feast of the Presentation

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.

All-powerful Father,  
Christ Your Son became man for us  
and was presented in the temple.  
May He free our hearts from sin  
and bring us into Your presence  
we ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, Your Son,  
who lives and reigns with You  
and the Holy Spirit, one God,  
for ever and ever. Amen

## PASTOR'S SCHEDULE EVENTS OF THE COMING WEEK

Saturday 2 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass

10:00 a.m. Baptism & Convalidation

1:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass Feast of the Presentation Blessing of Candles &  
Blessing of Throats

7:00 p.m. Meetings



Sunday 2 Feb Feast of the Presentation

7:00 a.m., 8:30 a.m., 11:30 a.m. Masses Blessing of Candles & Blessing of Throats

Monday 3 Feb Day Off

8:30 a.m. Mass

Tuesday 4 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass

Meeting off Campus

5:30 – 8:30 p.m. St. Brides

Wednesday 5 Feb

6:30 a.m. Mass

7:00 – 8:30 a.m. Confessions

8:30 a.m. Mass

11:00 Amazing Grays' Mass

6:00 – 9:00 p.m. Parent's Session First Communion

Thursday 6 Feb

8:30 a.m. Mass

5:00 p.m. Confessions

6:30 p.m. Mass

7:00 p.m. RCIA Teaching Mass

Friday 7 Feb First Friday

8:30 a.m. Mass Exposition of the Holy Eucharist

11:00 – 3:00 Meeting

5:00 p.m. Confessions

7:00 p.m. Mass & Benediction

Saturday 8 Feb

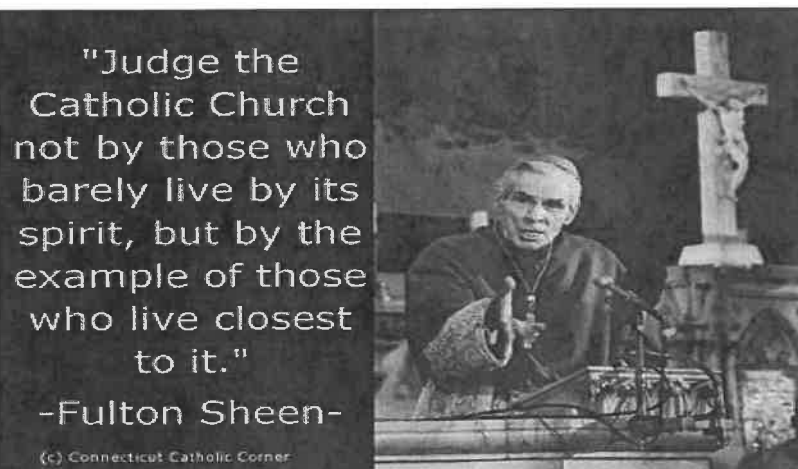
8:30 a.m. Mass

1:00 -4:30 p.m. Confessions

5:00 p.m. Vigil Mass Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time

Sunday 9 Feb Fifth Sunday Ordinary Time

7:00 a.m. 8:30 a.m. 11:30 a.m. Masses





# ARE CATHOLICS REALLY CHRISTIANS?



We can read in the Acts of the Apostles: "And they [Barnabas and Saul] conversed there in the church a whole year; and they taught a great multitude, so that in Antioch the disciples were first named Christians." (Acts 11:26)

It was from this very same place—in Antioch—where St. Ignatius, one of the early Church fathers, served as bishop.

In one of his seven letters, which St. Ignatius wrote on his journey from Antioch to Rome to be martyred at around 110 A.D., he said in his letter to the Smyrnaeans:

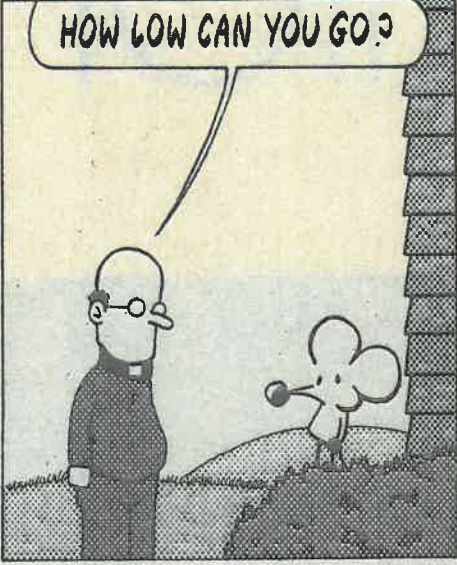
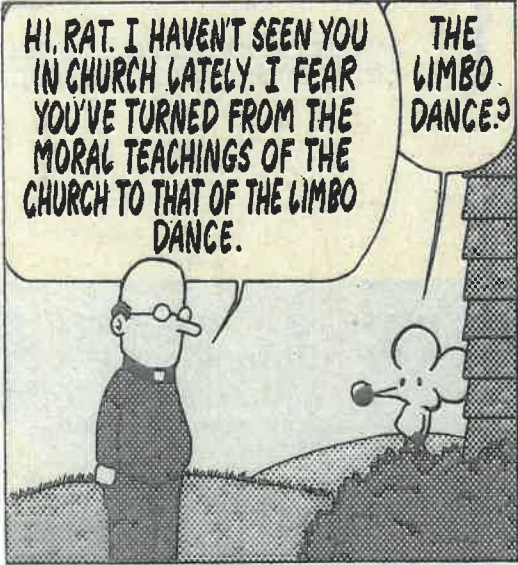
*"Whereas ever the bishop appears, there let the people be, even as whereas ever Christ is, there is the Catholic Church."*

Ignatius, who mentioned the word 'Catholic' in his letter, and served as bishop in the place where Christ's followers were first called Christians, was a disciple of St. John the Evangelist, one of the 12 Apostles of Jesus.

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## pearls before swine

Stephan Pastis



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