

## Fr. Perricone - On the Presentation of Our Lord/Purification (Candlemas)

Though Feb. 2<sup>nd</sup> is long past, the memories of your celebrations are still vivid. What celebrations, you ask? A thousand pities that any Catholic would permit the feast of the Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple (Candlemas Day) to pass unnoticed, *and* without fanfare. February 2<sup>nd</sup> is actually the unofficial conclusion of the Christmas celebrations, forty days having passed since that great feast (Catholics never skimp on celebrating). At the Vatican, and most European countries, the crèche is left standing all throughout those forty days.

Of course, the real pity is how many truly fervent Catholics let important feasts like this one pass without attention. One more demonstration of how modernity can creep upon us like a soft drizzle which is ignored but still leaves us drenched. Not that Catholics should stand watch like some eccentric white supremacist finding enemies beneath every rock. Not that at all. Rather, Catholics must seriously exert themselves daily to resist the encroachments of modernity. Effective above all else is an intimacy with the traditions of the Church (especially the liturgical ones) which keep our feet firmly planted on Catholic *terra firma*, even as we walk the ways of Modernity's world. To this St. Paul is instructive, "Stand firm, then, brothers, and keep the traditions that we taught you, whether by word of mouth or by letter." (2 Thes 2:16).

Our immersion in the liturgical traditions is not for the sake of esoteric hobby. Each movement of the Roman liturgical calendar rumbles with existential import. Every feast meets some burning need of man and his earthly condition. Pope Benedict XVI once wrote (as Cardinal Ratzinger),

*"How on earth is it that faith still stands any chance of success even for us? I would say that it is because it finds correspondence in the nature of man...There is in man an inextinguishable, nostalgic aspiration toward the infinite. None of the answers which he seeks is sufficient; only the God who has made himself limited in order to pierce*

*through our limitation and to lead it to the breadth of his infinity is able to meet the questions of our being. Thus, again today, the Christian Faith shall return to find man..."*

With each feast day, especially the greater ones, man dives into the deep waters of the infinite. A unique refreshment and wonder covers the soul. Man finds himself better able to see himself, other men and the world in which he lives.

Nothing less than this happens on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the feast of Our Lord's Presentation in the Temple. According to the Jewish law of the day, each first male child was to be specially dedicated to God, thus Our Lady and St. Joseph were fulfilling their religious duty by bringing Our Lord to the Temple for this important ceremony. This law was an everlasting memorial of gratitude to God for rescuing Israel was the grips of Pharaoh in the Exodus. We recall the final straw, as it were, for Egypt was the final plague sent upon that land when the Angel of Death was sent by God to take the life of every first born male, be it animal or human. This awful act of Yahweh brings Pharaoh to his knees, and he releases the Jews. It is fitting that Israel celebrate that mighty divine act of liberation by this ceremony of dedication of first-born *living* males to God's glory.

While Our Lord should have been indeed exempt from such an act of gratitude, since He was the God Who produced Israel's liberation, He submits nonetheless. God's mysterious Ways are once again on display. He is exhibiting his unity with man because He is a *man* Himself: an act of humility which moves and instructs us. Our Lord does not cling to the rightful prerogatives of His Divinity when His love for us demands a surrender of those rightful prerogatives. Humility is the melody of love. Love is ever eager to abandon anything for the sake of the beloved. Our Lord is *perfectus Deus, perfectus homo* (*perfect God, perfect man*) and so love, and its ally, humility, is perfect as well.

Adorning this feast are any number of divine lessons and ironies. One is that Our Lord is being presented in a temple, when *He Himself* is the *true* Temple. Another, the temple is filled with light, but the True Light is

Christ. A third is the old man Simeon who waits all his life for the consolation of Israel, and now he exclaims "*Nunc Dimittis (Now you may dismiss your servant in peace...)*", because he finds it in the Child. Or as the **Divine Office** of *First Vespers* puts it, "The old man held the child, but the child was his king."

Of all the truths of this feast the most dramatic is Christ as the light of the world, hence the consolation of Simeon, Israel and the human race. St. Sophronius (560 A.D., Egyptian ascetic, theologian and Patriarch of Jerusalem) weaves this truth exquisitely into his sermon for this feast,

*"Indeed this is the mystery which we celebrate, that the light has come into the world and has given it light when it was shrouded in darkness... That is why we go in procession with lamps in our hands..."*

*Let none of us remain a stranger to this brightness...let us all go together bright with that light to welcome with old Simeon that everlasting shining light."*

For thousands of years, on this feast, Mother Church blesses all the candles that will be used at Holy Mass or any other sacrament or religious ceremony. Anytime any of those candles is lit its fire takes our minds and souls to Our Lord as light of the world, as well and His burning love which sets afire every heart which welcomes him.

It is clear that the world presents us with other "lights" - the "light" of philosophy and the "light" of science. Each of these "lights" possess their own valuable, necessary and indispensable path to knowledge. However, all ultimately take their light from God. If man ignores God's "light", all the other "lights" become inky darkness. Look at the modern university and behold the result of knowledge separated God. It lies. Observe the world of science, today intentionally hiding itself from God's light. It steals life and makes man a monster. Let us not forget that Communism boasted

of being finally the “scientific” answer for which humanity always waited, unencumbered by the darkness of religion. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment struggled to wrest philosophy from the paralyzing hand of religion, only to find itself soaked in the blood of the Parisian guillotine. Flee from the light of God’s revelation and man’s world becomes only a black hole.

Never think that any feast of Mother Church is pertinent to only the priest and a handful of Catholics in the pews. It is the answer the world needs. It is the key unlocking the treasures of man’s happiness. Every time a Catholic neglects to celebrate these feasts, the world becomes a bit poorer and much darker. But so does he.