

FEBRUARY 1&2, 2020  
THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

This weekend we interrupt the cycle of Sundays in Ordinary Time for today's feast of The Presentation of the Lord. Some of us may remember that this feast is also called "Candlemas". In a tradition dating back to the Middle Ages, the faithful would bring the candles to be used in their homes throughout the year to be blessed on this day. In that pre-non-harnessed electric time, especially during the long cold nights of winter in northern Europe, fire and light were sources of comfort and security. An even earlier tradition written about by the 4<sup>th</sup> century Christian pilgrim to the Holy Land, a woman named Egeria, is that of people carrying lighted candles in procession on this feast in commemoration of Joseph and Mary bringing the child Jesus to the Temple and of Simeon and Anna going out to meet him. Thus, light and encounter came to be principal symbols of this feast.

The prophet Malachi in the first reading speaks of the coming messenger of the Lord to the Temple to renew and purify the covenant relationship between God and Israel being like "refiner's fire" (Ml. 3:2), the light and heat burning away the dross of sin, enabling God's people to shine like gold or silver. The aged Simeon in the Gospel comes to the Temple, and encountering the young couple Joseph and Mary, takes the Holy Child in his arms. By the light of faith he sees the fulfillment of all the prophecies concerning the advent of God's messiah. As the darkness of the night of death appears on the horizon of his life, Simeon proclaims: *Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.* (Lk.2:29-32). Simeon's prayer, known as the "Nunc Dimittis", from the first two words in the Latin translation of the Bible, is the final prayer of the Church's daily public prayer at "Night Prayer" or "Compline", in the Liturgy of the Hours. In the ninth chapter of St. John's Gospel, is the encounter between Jesus and the man born blind from birth. We will hear it on the Fourth Sunday of Lent this year. Jesus tells this man who has lived in darkness (the symbol of sin, ignorance of God and death) his whole life, *While I am in the world, I am the light of the world* (Jn. 9:5). Then he sends the man to wash in the pool of

Siloam and receiving his sight, a symbol of baptism and the imparting of the light of faith with its gift of eternal life.

In his homily for today's celebration, Pope Francis states: **Today's liturgy shows *Jesus who goes out to meet his people*. It is the feast day of encounter: the newness of the Child encounters the tradition of the temple. ...What does this mean for us? Above all, that we too are called to welcome Jesus who comes to meet us. *To encounter him*: the God of life is to be encountered every day of our lives; not now and then, but every day. To follow Jesus is not a decision taken once for all, it is a daily choice. And we do not meet the Lord virtually, but directly, we encounter him in our lives, in the concreteness of life. Otherwise, Jesus becomes only a nice memory of the past. When we welcome him as the Lord of life, however, as the centre and the beating heart of everything, then he is alive and lives anew within us. And what happened in the temple also happens to us: around him everything meets, and life becomes harmonious. With Jesus we find again the courage to carry on and the strength to remain firm.**

The familiar refrain from the well-known childhood hymn, *This Little Light Of Mine* sums up this meeting between Jesus and us and our mission flowing from it.

**This Little Light Of Mine, I'm gonna let it shine, This Little Light of Mine, I'm gonna let it shine. ...Yes, I'm gonna let it shine, Let it shine, let it shine.**

**The light that shines is the light of love, Lights the darkness from above, It shines on you and me and shows what the light of love can do. I'm gonna shine my light both far and near, I'm gonna shine mine light bright and clear, where's there's a dark corner in this land I'm gonna let my little light shine.**

**This Little Light Of Mine, I'm gonna let it shine, ...Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine.**