



Fourth Week of Ordinary Time and the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord: 30th

January / 2nd February 2022

Reflection / Homily – Mgr Daniel McHugh

“Does Candlemas bring Christmas to an end?”

Some years ago I remember well the fact that the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, also known as Candlemas, fell on a Sunday and it was a wonderful opportunity to celebrate with the whole Parish Community this special Feast. I often think, in these days when we have special Feasts of the Lord moved to Sunday, that it is an example of a Feast that should be marked on a Sunday, as it is so intimately connected Liturgically to the closure of the Christmas and Epiphany Season.

This week the Presentation of the Lord is as usual on the 2nd February bringing to mind that it was 40 days after the Birth of Jesus that Mary and Joseph took Him to the Temple to present/consecrate Him to God the Father. It was also the occasion of the Purification of Our Lady, the day according to Jewish Law when a woman would go back to the Temple after childbirth.

There are many different dimensions to this Feast: the main ones are its link to Christmas, the Birth of Jesus, and to the Epiphany, His manifestation to the world. And, its link to the Passion in the words of Simeon, and the unique role of Mary His mother in both.

It is a Feast of Light; first because of Simeon’s prophetic words when he welcomed Christ in the Temple, greeting Him as the light which would enlighten the Gentiles; and also because of the Candlemas Procession, in which candles are carried. Similar processions were formally held on other Feasts of Our Lady; the Candlemas Procession in this case celebrates Christ the Light of the World.

Until 1969, the ancient Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord, which is of Eastern Origin, was known in the West as the Feast of the Purification of Our Lady and closed the Christmas cycle. It retains a popular appeal, but there was a danger that in popular piety it could lose its focus on Christ: hence the title the Presentation of the Lord, was preferred Liturgically. Many Catholics at home and in the Parishes retain the tradition of keeping the Nativity Crèche and other Christmas decorations until this Feast.

The theme of the Epiphany or Manifestation of Jesus as Divine, which is so closely linked to Christmas in the Feast of the Presentation, can be extended to His whole life. Indeed, in the Ordinariate, Epiphanytide goes on Liturgically until Lent begins.

This Fourth Sunday of what is now called Ordinary Time moves on from the amazement of the people at the Teaching of Jesus in the Synagogue of Nazareth, and their approval of Him, to the questioning of His authority as He begins to unfold His mission which is

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clearly for a wider world than the Jewish people alone. Some didn't like the fact that they knew His family - He was the adopted son of the Carpenter, Joseph. Others didn't like the fact that He challenged their narrow view of the Mission of the Messiah for the Jewish people alone. It is helpful to consider the historical context of St Luke's Gospel: Luke had witnessed the acceptance of the Gospel message among the Gentiles and he seeks to explain why it was not so well received by his Jewish contemporaries. We are moving on, post the Baptism of Jesus when He was an adult, to the beginning of His public life. This prepares us for the season of Lent – which is not too far off now – when we see the rejection of Jesus and His teachings taken to the ultimate in His Passion and Death. Simeon said to Mary “a sword will pierce your own soul too”. The animosity of the people of Nazareth prefigures and prepares the reader of Luke's Gospel for the Cross. Luke wants all to understand that it is through His death on the Cross that God offers His Salvation for all.

As I compose this Reflection on the Day of Prayer for the People of Ukraine (26th January), called for by Pope Francis, I am conscious that they are called to deepen their trust in the Lord that the Cross of oppression bought about by the self-interest of others will lead to a closer relationship to the Lord, who leads all of us to new life with Him. I conclude with this prayer by the Ukrainian Catholic Bishops outside Ukraine:

We pray that the Lord God sends His Holy Spirit to all the people of Ukraine and gives them the grace of endurance in faith, hope and love amid the current ordeals; may peace be granted throughout Ukraine and our nation be delivered from all enemies, so that we may glorify the good and merciful God in justice and truth.

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