

Dear Brothers and Sisters



This week we enter the month of February. All the priests in recent memory who have served here at Our Lady Mother of the Church have birthdays in February! I don't know if that is a condition for serving here, but it is a fact that our three previous Pastors, Fr. Tom Arminio, Msgr. Tom Salemi, and Fr. Rich Kelly, all have birthdays in February. Fr. Siffredus also is a February baby - Feb 6th! I share a birthday with Fr. Tom Arminio, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>. This date is also Groundhog Day – something I never knew existed before coming to the US! This coming Wednesday February 2<sup>nd</sup> is, more importantly than any birthday, a wonderful day in the Church's liturgical calendar: The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Forty days after his birth, Jesus was brought to the Temple in accordance with the Law of Moses. Forty days after Christmas, we celebrate this fact. Jesus was presented in the Temple to be redeemed, meaning to be 'bought back,' or to be offered to God. Joseph and Mary were fulfilling the precept of the Book of Exodus:

“Sanctify to Me every firstborn, the first offspring of every womb among the sons of Israel, both of man and beast; it belongs to Me.” Ex. 13:2

At the Passover the firstborn of the Egyptians, both man and animal, were killed, but Israel's firstborn sons and animals were spared. Henceforth, the firstborn belonged to God.

There is a great wisdom in this. Our children are not our own, they do not belong to us; their true identity is that of being children of God. A dad once told me how he came to the realization that he had, for many years, done a poor job as a parent because he thought his son was his, and not God's.

A child's greatest freedom and security comes from their knowing that they do indeed belong to God. Mary and Joseph knew this very well, and took their new born to the temple to redeem him, to offer him to God. Being poor they did not have a lamb for the offering, so they instead gave the offering of the poor – two turtledoves.

This Feast Day also used to be called the Purification of the Virgin, recalling the ancient tradition whereby mothers were purified after birth.

Why were they purified? Because they had lost blood in the act of giving birth, and blood is holy, is life itself. The act of Purification acknowledged that God is the author of all life, and that all life is sacred. This Purification was once also known amongst Catholics as 'churching,' whereby a mother, having given birth, was welcomed back into the church. The mother would hold a lighted candle, and be led into the church from the vestibule, with prayers of gratitude being said for her safe delivery.

Hence Candlemas Day. Traditionally today was also known as Candlemas Day, and signified the end of the Christmas Season. It was the day in which candles were blessed and distributed for use throughout the year.

In today's world life is increasingly cheapened, and blood is all too easily shed. Bloodshed has also been legalized by abortion laws, and for our youth bloodshed is glorified in video games; it has become a multi-million-dollar industry. The Feast of the Presentation redresses this, declaring life for what it is – a gift of God, and to be respected.

Christ is the light of the nations, and he enters today into his Temple. May he be presented in our Temple, in each one of us, as we acknowledge our life as coming from him, and dedicate ourselves to him.

Fr. Sean