

Dear Brothers and Sisters



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.

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. 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, when the people of God were freed from the slavery of Egypt, the firstborn of the Egyptians, both man and animal, were killed. Israel's firstborn children and animals were spared. God spared the firstborn children of Israel. As a perpetual memorial of this fact, the firstborn was henceforth recognized as belonging 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. Our major cities are on constant vigilance against terrorist threats. Bloodshed is has been legalized condoned by abortion laws. Bloodshed is glorified in video games. The Feat 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