

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD (2025)

Today we celebrate the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, and this feast is filled with rich symbolism. It has been celebrated since ancient times – at least since the 4th century in Jerusalem. From that city, its observance spread to Rome and then to the whole Church.

Because of the many themes associated with this feast, it took a long time for the Church to settle on a name. At various times, it has been called, “The Purification,” “The Meeting or Encounter,” “Candlemas,” and the name we use today, “The Presentation of the Lord.” Each of these names highlights a particular theme or point concerning this feast.

So, when we call this Feast “The Presentation of the Lord,” our attention is focused on the role of our Lord Jesus Christ. We consider the divine infant who was presented in the Temple according to the command of the mosaic law. These decrees are spelled out in the Book of Numbers and in the Book of Exodus.

It was there the Lord said to Moses,

“Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and beast is mine ... Every first-born of man among your sons you shall redeem (Ex 13:2,13).”

So to fulfill the law of God, the Blessed Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph went to the temple to redeem their firstborn son.

When this feast was called “the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary,” our attention was focused on the role of our blessed lady. That name for this feast was inspired by the first lines in today’s Holy Gospel, namely,

“When the days were completed for their purification according to the law of Moses”

These words refer a decree of Moses found in the Book of Leviticus (Lev 12:2-8). That decree required that 40 days after the birth of her male child, every woman should undergo a religious ceremony of purification. For this ceremony, she was to provide a year-old lamb as a holocaust and a turtle-dove or young pigeon as a sin offering.

This explains the sacrifice referred to in today’s Gospel. It was not a sacrifice for the redemption of Our Lord who was Mary’s first born. Rather, it was an offering and sacrifice for our Lady’s purification after the birth of her child.

By the way, here is an interesting thing about this feast. It is always celebrated on 40 days after Christmas on February 2nd. So, in the Church year, we have the same interval of time between Christmas and the Presentation as there was between the birth of Jesus and our Lady’s purification, that is, 40 days. In this way, the life of Christ is traced out in the Church year.

A third name given to this feast is “The Meeting” or “The Encounter.” This title is used in the eastern Churches where this feast goes by the Greek name, Ὑπαπαντή (Hupapante). This title recalls the meeting of Jesus and Mary with the holy man Simeon. In a mystical sense, Simeon represents the whole human race as we meet our Lord in the Temple for the first time.

Simeon had longed to see the Messiah, and when he did, when he held the Christ Child in his arms, he blessed God and uttered his famous prayer,

“Now, Master, you may let your servant go in peace, according to your word, for my eyes have seen your salvation, which you prepared in sight of all the peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for your people Israel.”

Then Simeon spoke these words to Mary,

“Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted – and you yourself a sword will pierce – so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.”

These are very mysterious words. In part they have been understood by the Church to refer to the sufferings that our Lady would undergo as she watched her beloved Son suffer and die on the cross for our sins.

There is another name for this feast and that name is “Candlemas.” Simeon said that Jesus would be,

“A light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for [God's] people Israel.”

Light has always been associated with Christ and with the supernatural life of grace. Candles symbolize Christ who is the light of the world, and so, today we bless candles both for liturgical use and for our own use at home.

Jesus, the light of the world is symbolized by the flame of the candle. It was this light who Mary presented in the Temple. That explains why we bless candles on this day.

It's interesting that the name “Candlemas” comes from England. It goes back to the time when England was a Catholic country, the time before the Reformation. The name Candlemas is similar to the names Christmas or Michaelmas. Each of these names point to the theme for the Holy Mass celebrated on that day. So, Candlemas Day is that day when Candles are blessed at Mass.

As another aside, I would like to remind you that you should all have a blessed candle in your home, and light them when you are saying prayers, or in times of danger such as storms or family troubles. Also, a blessed candle should be lit when the priest brings Holy Communion to the sick or when he comes to give the Last Rites. No home should be without a blessed candle.

Among all the themes and ideas behind our feast today, I would like to call your attention

to one in particular, and that is the theme of humility. We are called to be humble. In fact, Jesus said that unless we become like little children, we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (Mt 18:3).

Saint Thomas says that the virtue of humility involves the knowledge of one's limitations, and further, the acknowledgment that some things are beyond our abilities. Consider how those in today's Holy Gospel not only acknowledge their lowliness, but in the case of Jesus and Mary, choose to keep their greatness concealed.

No doubt Saint Joseph was humbled in that he was unable to afford a year-old lamb for the holocaust. Instead, he had to purchase two doves as a substitute. To live in poverty is often humiliating. One has to ask for help. To go to food shelves. To get used clothes from thrift shops. Yet humility also helps us realize we depend upon God for everything.

Consider too the faithful and holy man Simeon who desired nothing more in life than to see the consolation of Israel, the Messiah. Once he had seen the Lord, he prayed,

“Now Master, you may let your servant go in peace.”

Simeon did not desire great things in this world. He did not desire fame and fortune. His only desire was to see God.

Also in the gospel today, mention is made of the holy and devoted servant of the Lord, Anna. She was a widow. She was constantly in the Temple worshiping and fasting and praying. No doubt few paid attention to her, but the Lord didn't reveal Himself to the great and powerful; instead, the Lord revealed Himself to her. The Gospel says that when she saw the infant Jesus,

“She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem.”

Then there is Mary. She humbly fulfilled the laws of purification despite her complete purity. She was the most pure virgin, both before and after the birth of Christ. Yet she humbly submitted to the law.

Finally, there is the Christ Child who was and is God, the very author of the law to which He Himself submitted. He certainly had no need of ransom. As God, He was the Creator of all things, yet in humility and as an example for us, He submitted Himself to His own law and ultimately even to death on the Cross, a thing far beneath His dignity as God.

So then, as we consider these examples of humility, let us not presume to be greater than we are. Rather than calling attention to ourselves, let us look to the examples of Simeon and Anna and Saint Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary and most of all of Jesus Himself, all of them far more worthy in God's eyes than we are. Yet they did not crave attention and recognition. Instead, they humbled themselves, and in so doing, they were exalted. Let us go and do likewise. Amen.