

CHRIST, LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence. I ask your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, Saint Joseph my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

Today we contemplate in a more direct way the fourth Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the Presentation of Our Lord. In a certain sense, the Christmas season - not liturgically but in spirit - ends on today's feast. The last celebratory Presentation of Our Lord - the grand celebration of Christmas is our Lord's initial presentation of himself; in a more immediate sense, to the shepherds. We then celebrate the fact that the little baby is not only human but God, and we focus a little bit on Mary being the Mother of God, the baby being presented as God with a human nature, maintaining his divine nature.

Third manifestation of Jesus' epiphany - does mean *manifestation* in Greek, to the Gentiles - represented by the three magi who embark upon an arduous journey to see the Lord. And the fourth one, Jesus is presented in the temple, and he is presented as the light of the world. He's proclaimed as a light, as the hope, as the meaning of every human life. He is the light of the world. And these two mysterious visitors of the temple - Simeon, who is a prophet in his own right, and Anna, the prophetess - they get the opportunity to actually worship the Lord as an infant because of their goodwill - harkens back to glory to God in the highest and peace to people of goodwill. This goodwill, this disposition, to identify with God's will, this disposition to love God and love others, is the staging area to have this encounter with Jesus.

This feast is also called the Feast of Lights. Bigger Masses will have a procession of lit candles to celebrate this feast of recognizing in an official way that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World. We ask the Holy Spirit because these mysteries of faith, though at face value may not seem to have practical bearing, we need to be convinced and have the faith that there's nothing revealed, nothing celebrated in the Church, that cannot in some fashion influence our daily life.

What is the practical lesson or message of this feast, Presentation of Jesus? That he is the Light of the World and we're called to bask in that light and radiate that light. Just to give it a little bit of

historical background, this custom of presenting the first male child in the temple to be redeemed harkens back to the liberation of the chosen people in Egypt where God smote the first male of every Egyptian family - and if my memory doesn't fail me, every male animal would be smitten with death itself as a punishment for the enslavement of the Jewish people and the Jewish people would be spared of losing their firstborn sons provided that they redeem them with a slaughtered lamb. They would offer in sacrifice and unite themselves to that sacrifice by having lamb chops for dinner and they would use unleavened bread as a sign of anxiety, of urgency, to leave the forbidden territory of Egypt. The unleavened bread signifying there's no time to put leaven in the dough and wait for it to rise. You have to get out of there and so leav- unleavened bread as used.

Anyway, there's so many lessons from that event, but just to give it a little perspective, and Jesus being the firstborn son, Mary and Joseph brought him to the temple and redeemed him with pigeons because the poor could not afford a lamb. And so, they redeemed him with a couple of pigeons - for the poor, probably pigeons also signified a sacrifice that they felt.

But anyway, going back to this whole idea of Jesus being presented as Light of the World. What does that mean? And I could perhaps share a story that I've used in preaching. It's eight years... eight... eight years... eight days old nor ten days old that I was in a department store accompanying a friend who wanted to purchase a couple of cheap watches. A couple because a cheap watch will break, so now here's another- here's a watch to spare. And as he was trying to decide what watch to purchase a gentleman who was kind of unstable walked into the store and started to shout at the women there and demand that they talk to him. And you could tell he was a troubled man, maybe had too much to drink, but I- I think it was more than that. And they were getting nervous, and he caught sight of me - he caught sight of my collar. I had a coat, scarf... but I guess it still showed... had a mask on. So he didn't see much of me except for that collar and he started to shout at me: "This is a man of the cloth! You're a man of the cloth!" So he runs up to me and shouts, 'Say something, say a prayer! I'm a man of the cloth, I should say a prayer.'

And I said, 'Okay, I will.' And so I prayed out loud for him, for his intentions, for his physical welfare, for a spiritual improvement, healing, and then I blessed him. I invoked the intercession of the Blessed Mother and St. Joseph and imparted a blessing, made the Sign of the Cross - I don't know if he was Catholic or not. And then he looked at me. He didn't say anything, so something worked and he began to weep and sob out loud, and he told me that his- these were tears of deep joy, that this blessing - this prayer - meant so much to him, that we- he was so fortunate to get that blessing and have this encounter with Jesus, and he thanked me and walked out of the store - much to the relief of these workers.

And why do I share this story amid our meditation on the Presentation of Jesus as Light of the World? That I had nothing to do with it. I mean, he didn't even see an expression of my face- I had a mask, had a coat, and the only thing I virtually said was a prayer and a blessing that every individual - they could say no - wants the consolation of Christ, wants the joy of Christ, wants the peace of Christ. Perhaps they're not willing to believe enough or make the effort or leave aside practices of their lifestyle that are incompatible with the Commandments and the gospel, but a priori as a given, everyone needs Christ - we know that and everybody wants Christ. If they don't want him, they don't know who he is, they don't know that he is peace... he is joy... he is self-giving love. It's not that he has it, he is it and this infinite love of God the Father is translated in human form.

So let's read the passage... Mary and Joseph come in and they redeem the Son. There's a high priest officiating, or a priest officiating - not necessarily the high priest. Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeon... pigeons.

So this reveals that Mary and Joseph couldn't afford an actual lamb, so they paid for the redemption - redemption means buy back - so they buy back ceremoniously their son, Jesus Christ. But we just dwell on the event - this is no longer a ceremony, or only a ceremony. This is the real presentation, this is the real redemption. The redemption began I guess literally when Jesus was conceived. I mean his whole life is a redemptive action culminating on the cross, and this is a sneak preview to the cross. And so this offering of Jesus to God the Father and buying him back with the pigeons or turtle doves not only symbolize redemption - is part of the redemption - I mean, this is showtime. Jesus is actually offered to God as the price to be paid for our everlasting life, for our forgiveness, for our joy, for our transformation, for our purification.

And, perhaps after that ceremony occurred, the Gospel says there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout. So, again a lesson... How do I come in contact with this light of the world? I need- the Lord is telling me I need to try to aspire to a holy life and a devout life, a life that is marked by a substantial prayer life and we glean from this Gospel passage that to encounter Christ in a more intimate way depends on my disposition of wanting to be holy and wanting to be devout.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel. And the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And inspired by the Spirit, he came into the temple and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said, Lord now let your servant depart in peace according to your word for my eyes have seen your salvation. You

have prepared in the presence of all people a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for the glory to the people of Israel. And his father and his mother marveled at what was said about him.

It's number one that Jesus is announced as light and my vocation is to follow Christ and to radiate that light. When he goes public - literally the first admonition of Jesus - but early in the game, he proclaims his listeners, his potential disciples if you will, you are the light of the world. And let's invoke the Holy Spirit and ask what does that mean? I am the light of the world. Could I have it both ways? I mean I am the light of the world and Jesus says he's the light of the world. Well, who is this real light of the world? And Jesus will say later on his public life, 'I am the light of the world and he who walks with me will have the light of life.' And this light is life for the same time revealed by Saint John. He's the light and life of every person. But now I'm called the light of the world.

It's the same title Jesus gives himself. If I'm not mistaken, the only title Jesus ascribes to himself, and at the same time ascribes to his followers, is light of the world. Jesus doesn't call himself salt of the earth. He doesn't call the ordinary mortal, the resurrection and the life. Perhaps, he says we have to be good shepherds. But he explicitly only uses that one title that he gives himself, par excellence in an absolute sense, I'm the light of the world. He who walks with me will have the light of life. He says that should also be our title, are the descript- our description.

And it means that I need to share in that life of Christ - it's not... I'm not a solitary light. I'm a light in so far as I unite myself to the source of light. That light is refracted according to its components that we call Gifts of the Holy Spirit, or Fruits of the Holy Spirit peace, life,... peace, joy, goodness, charity... there's twelve of them. And the two prominent Fruits of the Holy Spirit ascribed to Jesus is joy and peace. And that forms part of this light. And only by giving off this light or radiating this light can people- or will people come back to Christ. Now with a virtual loss of Christian culture, of Catholic culture, you know, we can't make a sweeping generalization, but I think I'm safe to say a significant part, it's gone. Appreciation of objective morality is certainly gone. And without bad will just ignorance, lack of exposure to the truth, prejudices, all sorts of reasons. And just like those early days of Christianity, Jesus says, well, we have to lead with my very love. We need- you need to love as I have loved and they will come to- they will come back to me. They will know that you're my disciples by the love you have for one another, but it's not just love, it's my love.

And so I need to abide in his love as Jesus says. Abide in his love, unite myself to Christ, let Christ live in me. Hence, St. Paul has a mantra: Put on Jesus Christ. His claim to fame was that he was a light of the world. They came to Christ because they saw something in him and maybe a- another concrete anecdote can speak volumes. Young man, at most 30... early 30s, wants to share with me his conversion story - that now he's a fervent Christian, at least wants to be, wants to work at it. And I said, well, what's behind it? I know the grace of God, obviously. And he said well, what's behind it is

an eighty-eight old man, and I said well, now you're- don't leave me in suspense. He said, well he was - he interacted with this old man - I guess they were, they were in a gym and he was doing his workout, the old man was doing his own workout. I'm sure they didn't jog together or play one-on-one basketball. But anyway, the elderly man was there and you know, they run into each other and he was drawn to this old man, who could have been his great-grandfather, because of this ordinary love. This is not- this is in a weight room, this is in a gym you know. And this young man said he was moved to live his faith in a more fervent way, in a deeper way amid emotional display. He said he saw the face of Christ.

I saw, wow, while you're working out? He said, yeah, we became very good friends. I'm heartbroken because he's no longer with us. And I said, well tell me a little bit more about the older man. And I could have told him about the old man myself, but I wanted to hear him say it - not that I have a preternatural gifts to know what people do without knowing them, but I figure if you're that holy you must be going daily Mass, you must be adoring the Blessed Sacrament, you must be meditating on the life of Jesus, you must be going to frequent confession, you must be very devoted to the Blessed Mother, on and on and on. And I hit it right. I said, well tell me, and he told me just what I just said. And it wasn't that you know, the old man, just, I don't know, just hit it off. They- obviously they did hit it off. But his typical demeanor was to give everybody that kind of love... probably a widower trying to maintain the modicum of health to be able to be alert, to be able to see friends, to do some work, etc.

I would say that's a little bit of a template for us. And we can look at a light fixture. That a light fixture does give off light. You need filaments... that represents disposition, you know, material that can transmit light. But what's most important is that you put in the plug and swipe- flip the switch. You connect with the power source. The fixture's not the source of power - it gives off light as long as the power source is connected to that light fixture. Or maybe, rather have a more modern example - the phone has a flashlight, the smartphone has a flashlight. It illuminates and you could read and you could find you where the doorbell is if you're visiting someone who doesn't have their front light on. But that battery can run out of energy, run out of electricity, and no light goes on because the battery is the power source. We need to renew, recharge the battery by connecting that battery to the power source. We need to recharge the battery of our heart and our mind with the interior life.

The candle is the image of the light of Jesus. Traditionally use beeswax because bees work hard make a lot of sacrifice to produce wax. The worker bees a symbol of Christ's sacrifice. The light is on to the degree or while the wax is being consumed, which also signifies sacrifice. And once that wax is totally consumed there's no more light. And within that context Simeon gives Mary bad news - bad news in terms of her sorrow, bad news that her son will reach a tragic end of suffering and torture

and death. But that's that's our light, that's how the light is produced - that is the price of our redemption.

And Mary once again is confronted with decision that she originally made when the angel Gabriel announced to her that she was chosen to be the mother of God. And Mary's asked again, well, she's told that a sword will pierce through your own soul also. Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, for a sign that is spoken against and a sword will pierce through your soul also. Again, Mary has to embrace God's will that involves suffering and it's precisely this suffering that produces this light. And so, Jesus, the Light of the World, and port of entry is obviously prayer, and the other port of entry is uniting our work, uniting our contradictions, our sufferings to the power source, to the redemptive act of Jesus on the cross.

I'd like to finish up our prayer using the first point of *Forge* by Saint Josemaria who says it all. And we will ask the Blessed Virgin Mary to help us embrace this point. During this year of Saint Joseph we'll ask Saint Joseph as well. And I'll finish with this point: 'We are children of God. Bearers of only flame that can light up the paths of the earth for souls, of the only brightness which can never be darkened, dimmed, or overshadowed. The Lord uses us as torches to make light shine. It depends on us that many should not remain in darkness but walk instead along paths that lead to eternal life.'

I thank you my God for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations you have communicated to me in this meditation. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, Saint Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.



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