

- There is much going on with today's Mass, which is one of the richest feasts of the year!
- With today's feast of the Presentation of the Lord, we come to the very end of the Christmas-Epiphany cycle of the liturgy. Today we still find the Christ child in His mother's arms, but instead of cradling Him, she's offering Him in sacrifice.
- Originally, this feast was entitled the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, a reference to the Jewish law indicating that a woman was "unclean" after giving birth, and if the child was male, she was to present him in the Temple 40 days after his birth to fulfill the period of her purification.
- While this feast is probably the oldest Marian feast in existence – dating all the way back to the 4th century – this feast is really more about honoring our Lord. Nonetheless, we should take a moment to speak about Our Lady.
- It seems particularly odd to speak of the purification of the Blessed Virgin, as Our Lady was conceived without sin and remained perfectly pure throughout her life. Why did *she* need purification? The short answer, of course, is that she didn't!
- She was the purest of virgins, and yet in humility she obeys the mosaic law, offering a pair of turtledoves – an offering that, to the Jews, redeemed the newborn boy.
- Yet, again, Mary wasn't just offering a pair of turtledoves. She was offering Jesus in sacrifice for the whole world, an action He would fulfill 33 years later on Calvary. So, while this feast crowns the Christmas season, it also sets us up for Lent and Easter.
- In the midst of all this, we find the aged Simeon making his prophetic proclamation: "Behold, this child is destined for the fall and rise of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be contradicted."
- And then to Our Lady he said: "and you yourself a sword will pierce – so that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."
- In other words, Jesus would not be making His redemptive sacrifice all alone. His mother would in her own proper way share in Christ's suffering and death.
- Just as Christ's Sacred Heart was pierced by the centurion's lance as He hung upon the cross, opening up for us a fountain of grace and mercy, Mary's Immaculate Heart was pierced by a sword, providing a place to turn to for maternal solicitude when we suffer.
- Yet there's still so much more to this feast! The Orthodox call this feast "the Meeting of Christ." In the Temple, mankind now meets the Lord in the person of Simeon, who has long been promised by God to see the Messiah with his own eyes before he dies.
- And what does Simeon tell us? He tells us that this Christ child that he now beholds is *a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and glory for [the] people Israel*.
- In other words, Christ is the Light for all men, Jew and Gentile alike. He is the source of our salvation: the only means that any man has for being reconciled with God and attaining Heaven.
- Throughout the seasons of Advent and Christmas, Holy Mother Church repeatedly uses the symbolism of light to remind us that Jesus Christ is the Light of the World, all of which are symbols of Christ and the power He exerts over the darkness of sin.
- Our increased use of candles during this time of year is all meant to remind us that there is a Light that shines in the darkness of our world, a Light the darkness cannot overcome. And that Light is Jesus Christ, the Word-made-Flesh!

- This symbol of Christ as our light finds its culmination in today's feast, which is also known as Candlemas because of the prominent use of candles.
- One of the most beautiful elements of this Mass is the distribution and blessing of candles at the beginning of Mass, followed by the procession. On one hand the procession symbolizes the Christ Child being brought into the Temple by Mary and Joseph.
- Yet, the procession also symbolically presents the words we hear spoken by Simeon in his canticle, that Jesus is *a light for revelation to the Gentiles*, that He is now fully revealed to humanity so that even those of darkened mind and heart can know Him!
- And in placing blessed candles into our hands, Holy Mother Church is reminding us of the tremendous gift of enlightenment we first received at our baptism, when the light of Christ first entered our souls to dispel the darkness we inherited from our first parents.
- At our baptism, we were each given a lighted candle with an instruction from the priest that we have received the Light of Christ through that august Sacrament, and that, by living as a child of the light, we are to keep that flame of faith alive in our hearts, so that when the Lord comes we may go out to meet with all the saints.
- In other words, being a Christian is a tremendous gift – a gift, though, that comes with a responsibility. And that responsibility is to strive throughout the course of our lives to be like Christ, to take on His likeness, and to be His witness to others.
- But for this to happen, we must be purified; we must be refined. And this is where we turn to our first reading from the Prophet Malachi, the last prophet of the old covenant, whose prophecies the coming of the Lord to the Temple.
- Malachi tells us that the Lord's coming won't simply be a day of consolation, but a day of purification, for He is like a refiner's fire and will refine and purify us like gold or silver – for we are not perfectly pure like Our Lady.
- The process of personal purification, of being transformed by God's grace into a likeness of Christ, is a lifelong process – one that requires both stamina and courage.
- And it's a process that requires those virtues we received at our baptism: faith, hope, and charity. We must have absolute faith in God, place all our hope in His mercy and salvation, while loving Him above all else and our neighbors as ourselves.
- Building on the liturgies of the Advent and Christmas seasons, today's feast teaches us once again the all-important truth that Christ alone is our Light, the Light that the darkness of human sin and ignorance cannot overcome.
- Sadly, it seems that sin and darkness are gaining ground in the hearts of men today, as so many people turn away from Christianity and seek enlightenment and spiritual fulfillment in New Age and occult practices, or fabricated religions.
- Yet, the truth remains: salvation is only found in Jesus Christ. He alone is "the way, the truth, and the life." (Jn 14:6). Christ alone is the Light that shines in the darkness; Christ alone is the Light that the darkness cannot overcome.
- And there is "no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to man by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).
- So let us hold fast to this Light that has been placed in our hands today. Let us hold fast to Christ and Christ alone – letting go of any beliefs or practices that are not from Him.
- And let us be faithful to our baptismal promises by keeping the flame of faith alive in our hearts, trusting that when our Lord comes, we will be able to meet Him with Our Lady, with good Simeon, and with all the saints in the heavenly kingdom.