

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

Today is forty days since Christmas. It is the end of the season of the Incarnation. I guess everyone in our busy ness have forgotten about the presents that we exchanged all those forty days ago. The question is have we forgotten Jesus and thrown him out with the Christmas tree, and like children, who by now have broken their toys, have we broken our commitment to love ourselves and one another?

I have asked you to light a candle as a symbol of the Light which is Christ. We learnt that in the Christmas day readings. John said, "In him is life and the life is the light of all people" (1:4). Today we hear Simeon say, "he is the light, which is the revelation to the Gentiles, and he is the glory of the people."

There is a stark contrast between Christmas and today as we celebrate the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, known as Candlemass.

There are no stars in the sky, instead we have the star, Jesus, bringing his light to old people. There are no gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Instead, the gifts are two turtle doves. What is the same, is the simplicity that two peasants, Mary and Joseph, bring by doing the right thing. In the first instance it was them complying with the secular law of registering themselves as citizens of their hometown. In the second instance it was their compliance with the religious law of presenting their son to the Lord.

Yes, the Mosaic law stated that a woman must wait forty days to be cleansed of the blood and the pain that happens at the birth of a child. Secondly, the child must be presented to the Lord, also at the end of forty days. We'll find all this in the book of Leviticus.

When we bring our children to church to be baptised, we remember Jesus' baptism which we celebrated a couple of weeks ago; and we also bring our children into the church to become citizens of God's kingdom. Citizens who follow the religious practices that Jesus taught and are the values by which to live. Most people don't observe that forty-day rule, but I do believe that it is essential to bring our children to be baptised.

If we are lax in doing that, we soon become lax in teaching the children about Jesus. Teaching has an important role to play in our lives. Not only do we teach the children, but we also find ourselves, re-inventing ourselves in Christian values, by considering the finer points of our Christianity, which we want to bring to the attention of our children. Often when we teach, we come across a verse and we think I've never looked at it like that before. May be it is your child who comes with a question that makes us look at the verse more deeply. As I say,

teaching is enlightening.

A schoolteacher must continually be finding ways to make their lessons interesting, and understandable to the children. The teacher themselves benefit from their research and presentations. But if the teacher is not interested in what she teaches everyone hopes for a 30% pass. Do you want to see a doctor who only knows 30% of how to treat you. He might just cut off your ear to treat you for a heart attack. Sometimes I wonder at some people who speak about Jesus, but they have no sense of compassion.

When we think about it Christian values are truly simple; love God, love your neighbour. When we teach that to our children, it makes for kindness, goodness, joy and peace. Imagine a school where your child goes to and there are no drugs, no bullying, and the children learn and play together, fostering good Christian relationships. Is that not what Deuteronomy 6:6 means, "Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home, and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise."

In our love for one another we gain a clearer understanding of God, who in fact is non-domineering, nonviolent, supreme in service and self-giving. He is conspicuously purely perfect. His light has no shadows of violence, conquest, exclusion, hostility or hate.

In the Malachi reading we are told that Jesus' values are there to refine us, in the same way that silver is refined. Jesus' values are there to refine us, to make us perfect, and holy. That means to separate us from the evils which destroy life, when what is needed is a life that is the light by which to enjoy the fulness of the gifts of God.

I am continually amazed at the effect Jesus has when he comes into people's lives. I told you several weeks ago about the effect he had, while still in his mother's belly, when she visited her cousin Elizabeth. John the Baptist started jiving in his mother's belly, while Elizabeth broke into songs of praise.

When a very heavy pregnant Mary and Joseph arrived at an hotel. The owner made a plan and put them into a stable. How many others had he not turned away when that town was full of tourists. It was the presence of Jesus that made the hotel owner look with empathy at these strangers, Mary and Joseph.

Today we learn of the forty-day old child coming into the Temple. Firstly, he meets an old man who sings his song of worshipping God. That song is firstly prophetic. It tells that Jesus will be the light of the world, and that gentiles will turn away from their false gods to follow Jesus.

It tells that Jesus will turn the Hebrew religion into one that understands God and how he should be worshipped. It will be about upsetting the status quo, that is about equality, because all people are created by God, in His image.

Imagine yourself sitting on the grass under a willow tree and a stream silently drifting by, as in Psalm 23, that is the image of God. Imagine yourself in the fields and the moon and stars shining brightly. That is the image of God. Imagine yourself going for a walk, hand in hand with your spouse and with your children. That is the image of God. Go and look into a mirror. That is the image of God.

This a quote from someone else. "These days I am not obsessed by light. It is so hard to commodify. I am not talking about a beautiful dawn, or holidays in the sun, or the light that makes a photograph look good. I am talking about brightness itself, the air lit up. The gleam of the surfaces of my typing hands. I love the gift of its arrival. The light you see is always eight and a half minutes old. Always and again. And you think it is shared by everyone, but it is not shared, exactly – our eyes are hit by our own, personal photons. Perhaps in the end, the measure of understanding – which is love's other name – is not seeing the same light, but seeing the light in each other, the shy light shimmering over the ocean of our singularity."

Let us now return to Simeon. He says this prayer, "Lord now you let your servant go in peace, your word has been fulfilled." It is so beautiful, because all his life he has been waiting for this moment in time. Jesus Arrives and the divine promise is fulfilled. All that Simeon desired was to see the Messiah. Now with the arrival of the Messiah, Simeon can pass on to the next world.

You will no doubt recognise Simeon's prayer when it is said as our last departing wish that we give to our loved ones when they are placed in the hearse to take them to be buried. It is a wish that they will enjoy eternal peace in heaven. Maybe we are saying to them also that they have accomplished all that they ever wanted to do on earth. Now they will enjoy peace without the battle for survival, without the stresses and the fears that they had experienced. Now they are able to let go of all their fears and concerns and melt down into the arms of a loving saviour.

Life and death are part of the same process. We were born, as the Psalmist says in 139:12, "For you created my inward parts, you knit me together in my mother's womb." And the psalmist also says in 90:10, "The days of our life are three score years and ten." Death is a part of life.

What we are to do in our pilgrimage through life is to place our hope, faith and trust in Jesus Christ to rescue us from all evil and to be present to the Light of Jesus Christ that it might continually shine on us.

In the Light, which is Jesus Christ we are like the sheep in Matthew 25 who give food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, give clothes to the naked and take care of the sick. We can be like Anna in our gospel reading who worships Jesus and evangelises about the redemption that he offers. That is to live the full life so that when death comes, we can say like Simeon I have been with the Lord on earth, now I will be with him in his Kingdom.

Death is not an enemy. Love is victorious.

May the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.