

Candlemas

2nd February 2014

'The light of Christ'

Malachi 3: *the Lord you are seeking will suddenly enter His Temple*

Ps 23: *Let Him enter, the King of glory!*

Heb 2: *He should in this way be completely like his brothers.*

Lk 2: 22–32: *a light to enlighten the pagans ...*

It's 40 days, now, since Christmas Day — and in the old Catholic calendar 2nd February would have been kept as the last day of the Christmas season. In some places they keep the older practice of leaving the crib up till the 2nd February. On the 40th day, a Jewish child who was a first-born son would have been presented in the Temple, and consecrated to the Lord. The presence of Simeon is what makes this encounter interesting, because he sees immediately just who this child is: he sees that Jesus is the Christ, he senses that He is the Messiah — the Holy Spirit prompts him to realise that he is in the presence of the One who has come to save Israel, and indeed to save the world. He describes his joy in these beautiful words — “Now, Master, you can let your servant depart in peace ...” and in describing Christ's coming he calls Him the “light to enlighten the nations.” That's why we lit our candles and celebrate this feast day as ‘Candlemas’ — to mark the light

of Christ which is our faith, “the light to enlighten the Gentiles, and the glory of the people of Israel.”

On this feast of Candlemas, let's dwell for a little bit on this wonderful image of *candlelight* as a metaphor of our faith. If we think of *ourselves* as the candles, and of the *light* of a lit candle as our faith, then this image really comes alive:

1. A candle is made for lighting. We are made for faith. We are not made to be ‘unlit,’ any more than a candle is made to remain unburnt. We are made for faith, and to live in the love and warmth of God's light.
2. A candle does not light itself. Neither, for that matter, do we light our own faith — it is always a gift of God. He is the one who ignites that faith in us, even if it was right back at our Baptism and infancy. He is the source of faith; we did not invent it, or make it happen.
3. The light of a candle beautifies the candle itself. (An unlit candle, let's face it, is nothing special ...). Similarly, the human person, is made beautiful and special by faith. When our lives are lit up by loving

God, and loving our neighbour, we become what a human being is meant to be, in all his/her glory.

4. A candle consumes itself as it burns. So should we, as we are on fire for our faith, give ourselves entirely to God and to others. We should give up our own self and make sacrifices. Our life is for living and giving ... this is what we were made for.
5. A candle as it burns gives light and warmth to those nearby. So, faith lights up the darkness of life, and makes clear the way, not only for ourselves but for others. Our faith is not just for ourselves, but should shed a clear light for those around us.
6. Finally, we know how precarious a thing it is to keep a flame alight in the open air, and yet not impossible. We have to take our light of faith out into the world — out from inside the Church where it burns easily, to the outside world where sometimes it can be a struggle to keep the faith in the fierce gusts that oppose it. But we have to show to the world that there is light, an

unfailing light lit from Christ, a light that “darkness could not overpower.”

This image, then, is a powerful one, that helps us to understand faith. Every time we see these candles burning in the church we can be reminded that they stand for the light of faith.

As he took Jesus in his arms, Simeon’s immense joy that day was to see the One who would light up the darkness not just for Israel, but for the whole world. As we take Jesus into our souls in this Mass, let us imagine as we go out from this Mass, that we are aglow, so that the world will see our light! Let’s be that light; let’s promise to be that light for those around us. Even if the secular wind is fierce and unrelenting, let’s keep alight, for there is nothing that can replace faith, nothing that can replace that light for our life. Let’s treasure this precious flame, lit at Baptism, and do everything in our lives to nurture and sustain it.