

4th Sunday (C) [+ Candlemas]

3rd February 2019

'A Light for all the Nations to see'

Jer 1: *Before I formed you in the womb I knew you*

[or Mal 3]

Ps 71: *from my mother's womb you have been my help*

[or Ps 23]

1Cor 12–13: *Love is ...*

[or Heb 2]

Lk 4: 21–30: *no prophet is ever accepted in his own country* [or Lk 2: 22–40]

I'm juggling two sets of readings today, both the readings from yesterday evening (Candlemas) and the readings from today, the 4th Sunday of Ordinary Time. Both Gospel passages happen to be from St Luke (ch. 2/ch. 4), and each of them speak of the Lord Jesus entering into a Holy Place of Jewish worship (the Temple, as a baby, carried by His Mother and St Joseph; and the Synagogue, as He embarks on His preaching ministry 30yrs later). In both cases, Jesus is in effect taking His rightful place in His Father's house; and, whether as a baby or as a grown man, He is declaring that He is the Messiah. At the Presentation, it is the aged and saintly Simeon — and Anna too — who declares that this is the Christ; whereas at Nazareth in the Synagogue Our Lord states it Himself, using that Messianic prophecy of Isaiah — “the Spirit of the Lord is upon Me” — and then making the startling claim, “This text is being fulfilled even in your hearing!”

What does it mean, for the Messiah to have come? Many of the Jews believed Jesus's claim; others, as we know, did not, and strove to eliminate Him. Simeon knew, the moment he set eyes on the baby Jesus that this was truly the One, the Son of God, and he rejoiced in his heart and with his beautiful canticle, “Now, Master, You can let Your servant go in peace, ... for my eyes have seen the salvation which You have prepared for all the nations to see.” Simeon already saw that Jesus had come as the glory of Israel, but also for the outside world, the Gentiles, the whole of humanity. When Jesus reiterates this at Nazareth as He follows up his Scripture reading with words of wisdom — quoting the activities of prophets Elijah and Elisha — then that's when they turn on Him, oppose His message, and attempt as a mob to murder Him by throwing Him off a precipice. Already! Barely has Our Lord begun His ministry than He is being assaulted — and precisely for His message that God is opening up His salvation to all.

It's an important dimension of our faith in Christ that His coming was, and is, for all. Christianity is not linked to

some culture, some time, some race, or some people. Jesus is the universal Saviour, and our faith is ‘Catholic,’ i.e. global, and for all time. Pope Francis has emphasized this in his pontificate, by making many of his apostolic visits to less-prominent places. Last weekend he was with 6–700,000 young people at World Youth Day in Panama, one of the smallest of the Latin-American countries; last year he included visits to Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania; the year before included visits to Myanmar and Bangladesh. And this Sunday he goes to the United Arab Emirates, a papal first in the Arabian Gulf — though 4/5 of the population are Muslim, yet about 1m, mostly immigrant workers, are Christian, many from the Philippines and India. The Pope clearly has a sense of his global mission as Vicar of Christ, that no-one is to be neglected: no Christian is to be forgotten in a majority-Muslim state; nor is any country’s people to miss out on the chance of hearing the Gospel proclaimed.

Distorted human nature, suffering under the effects of sin and pride, can often create barriers, and we fail to reach out to others in humane and open ways. Jesus Christ

wished that all should be saved, and much of what He suffered, right from the beginning, was for that very reason. He never set up an ‘us vs. them’ situation, but sent His apostles far and wide to preach the Gospel to people who welcomed it and to those who did not. Let’s be reminded, as we hear Simeon’s prophecy at the Presentation, and Our Lord’s words at Nazareth, that Jesus is the Light of the World, Light of *all* the World. We are given that light to carry by Him — a light we received at Baptism, represented by the Baptismal candle — and it’s a light we are meant to share, to guide the lives of others, and not just ourselves.

Let’s not hide that light, but carry it boldly as a beacon through life, especially through the dark times of life, to light up our way, and provide a guiding light also to others around us, whether or not they yet share our faith in the Son of God. Then we will have the peace that Simeon experienced as He beheld the light of Christ for the first time, and knew that He would bring to the world the salvation that no-one else ever could: *“Now, Master, let Your servant go in peace, according to Your promise ...”*