

From the desk of the Pastor:

This Friday, February 2nd we celebrate the feast of Candlemas. This feast commemorates the moment that Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem 40 days after the birth of Jesus. The Jewish Law indicates that every first-born had to be redeemed by a sacrificial offering. The presentation in the Temple was also a rite of purification for the mother of the child who was considered ritually unclean until the purification took place. The Mass begins with a procession of candles to indicate that Jesus is the light of the world.

There are beautiful mysteries expressed in this celebration. Today I would like to meditate with you on the offering that Joseph and Mary made in the Temple and how this offering can help us to love the Mass more fully. St. Luke tells us that the Holy Family offered on this occasion a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons. Normally the preferred offering on this day was a young lamb. Nevertheless, the law allowed a poor family to offer two pigeons in place of the lamb.

We are given a clear indication of the poverty of the Holy Family. They could not afford to offer a lamb and so they offered the less expensive substitute at the Temple. It is beautiful to consider that Jesus entered into a very poor family when he came to the earth. God could have given for the Holy Family a much easier life or at least greater financial security. But in God's providence, the Holy Family experienced poverty so that they could rely more faithfully on the goodness of God who supplies for all our needs. This idea should be consoling for us. Although most of us are not as poor as the Holy Family, we all experience some form of "want" in our lives. The experience of wanting something without the financial means to obtain it, has great value for the soul. When we experience "want" we can open ourselves and allow God to take care of us. I feel a sense of pity for people who never experience any sort of financial strain because they never get the chance to trust in the providence of our Loving God.

A second great mystery about the offering concerns the absence of the lamb. When Joseph and Mary presented Jesus in the temple, they did not need to present a lamb in sacrifice because they literally were holding in the arms the Sacrificial "Lamb of God" who would take

away the sins of the world. When Mary and Joseph offered Jesus in the Temple, they offer the Lamb of God back to the Father. It would have been redundant to offer a second lamb in sacrifice. Jesus did not need to be "redeemed" by a lamb because he, himself, is the Redeeming Lamb.

In a way, we can say that Joseph and Mary symbolically foreshadowed the offering of the first mass because they were the first to offer Jesus to the Father when he was presented in the Temple. It was a foretaste and a foreshadowing of the perfect Mass that Jesus would inaugurate through the Last Supper and Crucifixion at Calvary. During the Holy Mass, we offer to the Father the perfect Sacrifice of Jesus who is forever Lamb of God. If we want to pray the Mass well every time that we attend the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, we can learn how to do so from Mary and Joseph. By their example in the Temple when they offered Jesus to the Father, they teach us the pious dispositions that we should have when we offer the celebration of the Holy Mass. I'd like to offer the following suggestions for how you can enhance your experience of the celebration of the Holy Mass.

1. Make an act of the will and an intention for the Mass before the Mass begins.
2. Participate - even if sometimes you feel tired.
3. Ask Mary to accompany you when you receive communion.
4. When you receive holy communion talk to Jesus from your heart.
5. Offer to the Father your life in union with the Mass.

Oftentimes we are distracted during the celebration of Mass. Normally, this should not cause us any anxiety. The reality of our human nature is that we are distracted by many thoughts and ideas. Unlike angels, who are able to fully concentrate, our minds are likely to wander from one moment to the next. As long as the distractions are not willful and we try to refocus our attentions, there is no sin in the experience of distractions at Mass. Nevertheless, a great way to avoid distractions is to make an act of the will as well as an act of an intention at the beginning of Mass. It is a good practice to make a firm decision of the will at the beginning of the Mass. Say a prayer to focus your will before the mass begins. The prayer could go something like this: "Jesus, I want to love you during this Mass and at this moment I make a firm act of the will to enter

into this Mass with my whole self.” After making a firm decision of the will, it would also be good to state a clear intention for what you want to pray for at Mass. For example, you may say: “I offer this Mass for my sister who is suffering from cancer,” or any other such intention of prayer. This act of the will and statement of intention will undoubtedly help you to avoid distractions and make the Mass a greater offering of love.

Next, I encourage you to get the most out of Mass, by your full, conscience and active participation. There are some people who come to Mass – and although they love the Mass –they never respond to any of the prayers or sing a single note of any song. If you celebrate Mass this way, then your celebration is anemic. Our responses and singing are not an optional part of Mass. Our participation not only helps us to praise God sufficiently, but also helps everyone else who is present with us at Mass. Imagine going to a football game where no one cheered or celebrated. It would be boring! The same is true of the Mass. We have a responsibility to participate vocally and actively in the Holy Mass and if you don’t participate fully, you are cheating God, yourself and your neighbor.

Another way to enhance your participation at Mass is to ask Mary’s help. We all know that our love for Jesus is not as pure and strong as it should be. But we also know that Mary never ever faltered in her love for Jesus. In order to help me to celebrate the Mass very well, I will ask for Mary’s help. Before I receive communion, I like to invite Mary to visit me. I tell Mary, “Mary come and live in me so that when Jesus comes, he will see you within me and thereby take delight in my soul. Mary, if you are with me as my honored guest and then Jesus will take great delight at the moment that he comes to me in Holy Communion.” If Jesus finds Mary living within you, then he will bless you more abundantly. Further, if my love is cold or inconsistent, I know that he will be loved by Mary perfectly every time he visits my home because Mary, his loving Mother, is my honored guest. I know that she can love in a way that never can.

Next, after you receive Holy Communion and return to your pew, **MAKE SURE YOU TALK TO HIM!** He is literally living within you in the Eucharist. Talk to him! Tell him your sorrows and joys. Talk to him as you

would talk to your closest friend and confidant. Tell him that you love him but also that you want to love him more. Shed tear and laugh for joy because the Lord of LOVE has visited your soul in Holy Communion. He wants to make his abode within your heart. Don’t waste time thinking about nonsense, rather use the time after Holy Communion as an intimate exchange of love between yourself and your living Lord.

Finally, when you receive Holy Communion, unite your life to the life of Jesus and give Jesus back to the Father. I like to speak to God the Father in the following way: “Merciful Father, I want so many things from you, but I have nothing to offer you in exchange. There is nothing I can do by which I may gain a hearing. I have no great sacrifices or heroic acts by which I could merit anything. Nevertheless, because I unite myself with Jesus, I know you will hear my prayer and grant me everything I could want or need. Father, I unite my tiny, insignificant life in union with the infinite love of Jesus in this Holy Mass. Jesus is the offering I make to you and I unite myself to him so that my nothingness becomes infinite in value when offered in union with him.” With this prayer of confidence, the Father will be moved to answer your every prayer.

My dear friends, the Mass is our life. It is Jesus and if you learn to pray the Mass in the ways I have described above, you will find great treasure. The riches of Christ will open up to you and you will have goodness flowing into your lap, pressed down and shaken together they shall be given to you.

In Christ,

Fr. Dave