

## 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday –Ordinary Time Year A 2026

**Isaiah 58:7-10; Ps 111; Cor 2:1-5; Matt 5:13-16**

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Lent is not far away, it begins the Wednesday after next Sunday. We should start thinking about it now.

I want to look back to Monday, just passed. It was the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, also known as the Purification of Mary, also known as Candlemas. The day marks 40 days after Christmas when Jesus is taken to the temple by Mary and Joseph. He is taken there so that Mary may be purified according to Mosaic Law, after giving childbirth, and enter into community worship again, so that she becomes clean. In order to do this, a sacrifice is offered: for the poor this is two turtle-doves. But something else happens, or should happen. Again, this is in accordance with the law of Moses.

In Exodus Chapter 13: 2, God says to Moses, *‘Consecrate to me all the firstborn. Whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Isarel, both man and beast, is mine.’* But God is very clear, the firstborn males of the animals are to be sacrificed, but the first-born sons are to be ‘redeemed’ – never sacrificed – redeemed, which means to be purchased back. The price of the redemption is, according to the book of Leviticus, 5 shekels.<sup>1</sup> So this is the process for presenting the boy Jesus to God. His parents take him to the synagogue to offer two turtle-doves in sacrifice for Mary’s purification, which they do, and to redeem the boy for 5 shekels. Except, according to Luke’s account in the Gospel, they don’t. For such a keen observer as Luke it is strange that he does not mention the 5 shekel redemption.<sup>2</sup> For Pope Benedict XVI this

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<sup>1</sup> Leviticus 18:15-15

silence is intentional. The late pope says In his book *‘Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives’* that:

*‘Evidently Luke intends to say that instead of being "redeemed" and restored to his parents, this child was personally handed over to God in the Temple, given over completely to God’p3.*

So, there we have it, Jesus enters the Temple where sacrifice is offered by his Mother for Him, but He will become, when he is 33 years old, the sacrificial offering for our purification and sin. And He is not redeemed, but rather handed over to God, for what will be the price for our redemption.

This is quite an interesting lense through which to view the Presentation of the Lord in the temple. It is a bridge between the birth of Jesus and the cross. Except no one was there to hear and see, because no one came to the Masses. No one came to receive his gift and to rejoice in what Jesus continues to do for them. Why not? Why this failure of desire.

Maybe Lent will be a time when we can re-gather ourselves.

The word ‘idiot’ has an interesting etymology. It comes from the Greek word ‘idios,’ which does not mean just foolish, but ‘closed off’, someone who is inward looking and self- absorbed. An idiot, in this sense, does not learn.

We want to learn at Lent, that is the point of it: learn about our relationship with God. This is why we use the ancient practices of ‘Fasting, Almsgiving and Prayer.’

Fasting means putting down what we have too much of. It is usually food, especially in our western world, and also our bellies clamour so much for our attention that it is worth while attending to the noise it makes and seeing if

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed insight look here: <https://stpaulcenter.com/posts/the-deeper-meaning-of-the-presentation-in-the-temple> accessed 6 Feb, 2026.

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you can turn its volume down. This is why we give up certain foods we like or eat too much of, because we will hear loud and clear that it has a claim on us. Yes, you can give up alcohol, soap-operas, pornography, swearing, gossip and internet time as well. That would be good. I have over-heard people say ‘instead of giving something up, I am going to do something’. This is not original. Not giving something up is an easy route out. Doing something is called ‘almsgiving’ and goes hand in hand with fasting.

Almsgiving is giving money to charity. This is good too. On the whole we have more money than we need and others have a lot less. So use it for others. If you do not have spare money, give time, give help, give your attention to a person not just an organisation. If you fast properly, the almsgiving will seem obvious.

Prayer. Do more. It is not a last resort. It is the first resort. You must pray every day, it is your channel to God, your life’s direction of travel. If you do not already, pray in the morning, even if it is two minutes praying the ‘Our Father’. Pray in the evening: give thanks for what you have done well, for what other people who have done well, and say sorry for that which you should be ashamed. But always give thanks. And always say grace, thanks for the food you have, for family and friends, & pray for peace and the poor.

So, what is the connection between empty churches at the Presentation and Lent? It presents us with the reminder and the challenge of not being idiots before God, not being self-absorbed and closed off. It reminds us that in order to accept Jesus’s offering of Himself for our salvation, well, we have to become offerings ourselves.