

*Lord, now you let your servant go in peace;
your word has been fulfilled.*

Dear Friends,

This Sunday, we celebrate Candlemas, or the Presentation of the Lord, a Feast that rarely falls on a Sunday and therefore is not known to many. Its significance is great in helping us understand and continue to unfold the mystery of the incarnation. As related in the traditional English name for the Feast, the principle element to the celebration is the candle or the light. For this reason, in some places where it is possible, there would be a procession with candles which would arrive in the church to begin the Mass. For our purposes, we will do the shortened version with the blessing of the candles at most of the Masses this weekend.

In the Gospel, Simeon, the man of God, exclaims with all his heart the words printed above. He has spent his whole life praying, looking, listening, waiting for the Messiah, the Christ. Upon encountering Jesus, his life is complete. He is ready to die and at peace after this encounter. This is the Gospel Canticle which is prayed every night by the Church in her Night Prayer. I cannot think of a more appropriate way to end the day after examining one's heart and thanking the Lord for His blessings. I began to pray Night Prayer shortly before entering seminary. As it's been a part of my routine for nearly 20 years, I can't imagine going to bed without it. There have been a few times when I was tempted to leave it off, only to be kept awake. My guardian angel wouldn't let me rest until I prayed. Immediately thereafter, I was able to sleep.

Today marks the 40th day after Christmas, the period of purification for mother and child according to Jewish practice, hence the presentation of Jesus by Mary and Joseph in the Temple to fulfill the Law. Although both were pure, immaculate even, they follow the tradition and it is in this that Simeon encounters his Savior and proclaims Him to be a "light to the Nations." He shines to guide us *all* on the way of holiness, reconciliation, and restoration. In His light and peace, we are encouraged to continue to pray, look, listen, and wait, as Simeon did. Just as He was presented to Simeon in the Temple, Jesus is presented to us in the Eucharist, and we encounter Him if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. He comes to us to give us His peace, so that with Him, we may continue our journey guided by the light of His love. Each day as we prepare to sleep, may we remember to look back on the day to remember and be aware of how we encountered Jesus in the blessings and in the struggles.

In the light of God's wonderful Love,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fr. Jack D. Shrum". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Fr. Jack D. Shrum
Pastor