

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST: 52nd ANNIVERSARY DEACON All Souls' Feb 2 2025 dtw

The El Salvadorian Archbishop and martyr Oscar Romero, gunned down at the altar while celebrating Mass in 1980, observed:

It helps now and then to step back and take a long view: The Kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a small fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that can be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything.

This is what we are about.

We plant the seeds that will one day grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold future promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capabilities.

We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realising that.

This enables us to do something and do it well.

It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.

We are workers not master builders, ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own.

On my father's grave in Pemberton, WA are inscribed two simple Latin words: Nunc Dimittis. "Lord, now lettest thy servant depart in peace according to thy word..." were the traditional words of the BCP that he knew so well. Like old Simeon in today's Gospel, my father, although he was only 54 when he died of a heart attack, had an uncompromised faith. And like Romero, he knew acutely that he was simply laying some foundations. Two weeks before he died, he had learned that I had been accepted by Fr John Lewis SSM to study theology here at Crafers commencing the following year in 1968, and that gave him great joy. I spent the next 5 years at St Michael's House. Unlike most students today, I experienced institutional theological formation; indeed, I became a temporary 'monk', with 5 services in the chapel every day, intensive work rosters, lectures and study over strict 16-hour days. Herbert Kelly, the founder of the SSM, once said "You can't learn theology without living it and you can't live theology without learning it". We did get most Saturdays off after morning choir practice so long as we had handed our essays in, and Sunday afternoons were free after lunch until Evensong.

One of my most vivid memories of those years was not when I was cloistered, up on the holy mount, but at one of the big demonstrations we joined against the war in Vietnam, on the intersection of King William St and North Terrace. I was terrified as mounted police stormed the huge crowd on their mammoth steeds. A young Adelaide uni student led those protests named Lynn Arnold. But my most vivid memory was the day I became a deacon after a memorable ordination retreat led by a humble priest, Canon Wilf Chittleborough, then rector of Glen Osmond.

Bishop Thomas Thornton Reed did the job. And in those days the bishop did just about the whole service. TT singing the Litany was something to experience, well, endure really ('miserable sinners' that we are). It was Feb 2, 1973.

It was called the Feast of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But this day is also known as The Presentation of Christ in the Temple and as Candlemass, celebrating the Light of Christ to the world. The Gospel is very familiar to most of us. The centrepiece of this Gospel is that old man Simeon taking up the infant Christ in his arms, praising God and saying those words which have been sung every Sunday night in Cathedrals, churches and chapels all around our world for centuries. And there is also the lovely story of Anna, the prophet, praising God for the child and worshipping night and day in the temple.

It has been a wondrous privilege for me to be hanging around temples all these years. And the temples are not just these buildings; they're the people we serve: temples of the Spirit. I have simply wanted to be an instrument for something that God has wanted to speak into those temples, or as Romero put it, for God's 'grace to enter and do the rest'. The centrepiece for all of this for me has always been the Eucharist, the Breaking of the Bread. At every Eucharist we, like Simeon with Anna, get to take up the Christ in our hands. All of us do. Isn't it a glorious wonder that we can then depart in peace bearing the light of Candlemass to the world?

The significant words from Simeon and Anna with respect to the observance of Candlemass are those that speak of the light for revelation to the gentiles, the glory of Israel and the redemption of Jerusalem. In Jesus, the light has come, the light that we have celebrated at Christmas and Epiphany and now proclaim in the spirit of Presentation and Dedication. In many churches at Candlemass, candles are blessed during the singing of the Nunc Dimittis and everyone processes around the church with their candles alight.

In conclusion, I would like us to focus today on the candle as a symbol of the light of Christ for a variety of significant events, liturgies and rites of passage in Christian and human life. We may be surprised to realise how this celebration of Candlemass, being tied up as it is with the presentation and dedication of Christ, is pivotal to these events. Our own lives, too, are presented in the temple (the church) to bear the light of Christ to the world. And it all begins with Baptism.

(Ad lib)

- The Paschal (Easter) Candle (placed next to altar today)
- Baptismal Candle – "Shine as a light in the world to the glory of God"
(shows a baptismal candle)
- Votive Candles – May the light of Christ shine in my prayer
(which are lit every Sunday and Wednesday by most attending)
- Birthday Candle - .(we would go on to light one on a cake for Brenton Brockhouse's 80th birthday at morning tea)
- Dinner candles – romance, celebration, seasons of the year.
- Ordination Candle – May the light of Christ shine in this ministry
(shows the 25th Priesting Anniversary candle made by a nun friend at Jamberoo, NSW)

Thanks be to God.