

# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

30<sup>th</sup> January – 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023

## Saints this Week

### The Presentation of the Lord (CANDLEMAS)

2<sup>nd</sup> February

#### Collect

**ALMIGHTY** ever-living God, we humbly implore your majesty that, just as your Only-Begotten Son was presented on this day in the Temple in the substance of our flesh: so, by your grace we may be presented to you with minds made pure. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

#### Reading

*Luke 2:22-40*

*Jesus is presented in the Temple*

<sup>22</sup> And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord <sup>23</sup> (as it is written in the law of the Lord, 'Every male that opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord') <sup>24</sup> and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons.' <sup>25</sup> Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. <sup>26</sup> And it had been revealed to



him by the Holy Spirit that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. <sup>27</sup> And inspired by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, <sup>28</sup> he took him up in his arms and blessed God and said,

<sup>29</sup> 'Lord, now let your servant depart in peace,  
according to your word;

<sup>30</sup> for my eyes have seen your salvation

<sup>31</sup> which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

<sup>32</sup> a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to your people Israel.'

<sup>33</sup> And his father and his mother marvelled at what was said about him; <sup>34</sup> and Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,

'Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel,  
and for a sign that is spoken against

<sup>35</sup> (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also),  
that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed.'

<sup>36</sup> And there was a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phan'u-el, of the tribe of Asher; she was of a great age, having lived with her husband seven years from her virginity, <sup>37</sup> and as a widow till she was eighty-four. She did not depart from the temple, worshipping with fasting and prayer night and day. <sup>38</sup> And coming up at that very hour she gave thanks to God, and spoke of him to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.

<sup>39</sup> And when they had performed everything according to the law of the Lord, they returned into Galilee, to their own city, Nazareth. <sup>40</sup> And the child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him.

## Reflection

**TODAY'S** celebration marks the end of the Incarnation Cycle in the Calendar. It commemorates the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple by his parents, forty days after his birth. Formerly known as 'the Purification', a feast of our Lady marking her ritual purification after childbirth, this celebration is now observed as a feast of the Lord. Mary and Joseph were obedient to the Law and brought offerings. Lev 12:6 tells us what is expected: a year-old lamb and either a turtle dove or a young pigeon. For those who are poor, as Joseph and Mary clearly were, a couple of turtle doves or two young pigeons suffice. St Luke often pairs a male and a female character in the story, so we have Simeon and Anna, both living in expectation of salvation from the Lord. Also typical of St Luke is the emphasis on the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has revealed to Simeon that, though he is old, he will not die before he sees the Messiah and, accordingly, he is 'inspired by the Spirit' to come to the Temple. Meanwhile, though 'night and day' is probably an exaggeration, the prophetess Anna spends a great deal of time in the temple precincts, and, seeing the Holy Family, prophesies the redemption of Israel. Simeon's song – *Nunc Dimittis* used daily at Night Prayer in the Church – recalls the theme of Isaiah's Servant Songs (see Is 42:6; 49:6), that the Lord's Anointed will be a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of God's people Israel. Forty days after Christmas the days are still short and the nights long, so it is no surprise that the Church seizes on the theme of Light of Christ in a dark world and celebrates with candles. It is also traditionally the occasion on which the candles for the year – at church and at home – are blessed.

## 3<sup>rd</sup> February

*St Blaise, Bishop & Martyr*

### Collect

**HEAR**, O Lord, the supplications your people make under the patronage of the Martyr Saint Blaise, and grant that they may rejoice in peace in this present life, and find help for life eternal. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

## Week 4 (Year 1)

### Collect

**GRANT** us, Lord our God, that we may honour you with all our mind, and love everyone in truth of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

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## Monday of Week 4 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 11:32-40*

*God had foreseen something better for us*

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats,

destitute, afflicted, ill-treated— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy— wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

<sup>39</sup> And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, <sup>40</sup> since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

## Reflection

**AFTER** paying tribute to the faith of Moses and of those who entered the Promised Land, the Letter to the Hebrews moves on to consider a list of subsequent figures. Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel are mentioned by name, and the prophets are mentioned as a group, but there is reference then to the unnamed heroes – male and female – whose faith was marked by courage, endurance, and hardship. What links all these people is that none fully received what was promised, since God had in store something more for those who come after. They form a cloud of witnesses (heavenly spectators) for those who put their faith and trust in Christ and they – with us – will find fulfilment in the heavenly Jerusalem, of which the Promised Land, towards which Moses travelled with the children of Israel, was a foretaste.

## Tuesday of Week 4 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 12:1-4*

*The Example of Jesus*

**12** Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

<sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

## Reflection

**THE IMAGE** today is the metaphor of a race, with the risen, ascended, and glorified Lord cheering us on. Not only that but we are encouraged by the example he has set by enduring everything for the joy that lay ahead. We are encouraged too by the 'great cloud of witnesses', the heavenly spectators, the heroes about whom we were speaking yesterday.

## Wednesday of Week 4 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 12:1-7, 11-15*

*The Lord disciplines him whom he loves*

**12** <sup>4</sup>In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup>And have you forgotten the exhortation which addresses you as sons?—

**'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,  
nor lose courage when you are punished by him.**

**<sup>6</sup>For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves,  
and chastises every son whom he receives.'**

<sup>7</sup>It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ....<sup>11</sup>For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant; later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, <sup>13</sup>and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. <sup>14</sup>Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup>See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no 'root of bitterness' spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled.

## Reflection

**HERE** we reflect on the part discipline plays in the development of endurance – in the athletic training, if you will. The last couple of verses (vv.14-17) set in a community context what might be seen as an individual

effort. After all, runners each run in search of an individual victory, and individual prize. The community is rather like a team: a team depends on peace and lack of rancour. We need not only individual holiness and virtue but communal holiness and virtue.

## Thursday of Week 4 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 12:18-19, 21-24*

*You have come to Mount Zion, to the City of the Living God*

<sup>18</sup>For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, <sup>19</sup>and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. ... <sup>22</sup>But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, <sup>23</sup>and to the assembly of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to a judge who is God of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, <sup>24</sup>and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel.

### Reflection

**THE HOMILY** – if the Epistle to the Hebrews is a homily – is coming to a climax. We contrast the earthly Mount Sinai with its daunting restrictions with the heavenly Mount Zion. The one is the inauguration of the Old Covenant, when God spoke to Moses and gave him the Law. (The Law comprises both the Ten Commandments and the complex ceremonial of priesthood, sacrifice, and sanctuary). The mountain was not to be touched, there is darkness and gloom, thunder and the fearsome phenomenon of the *phonos*, the voice of God. All of this makes Moses tremble with fear. The other, Mount Zion, is the encounter with Jesus, mediator of the New Covenant. Here we encounter vibrant angelic life, the congregation of the just – that is, those enrolled in heaven – and the satisfaction of the perfect sin offering, which the writer contrasts with the blood shed by Abel, the blood of an innocent man which, until the sacrifice of Christ, cried out for vengeance (see Gen 4).

## Friday of Week 4 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 13:1-8*

*Service well-pleasing to God*

**13** Let brotherly love continue. **2** Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. **3** Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them; and those who are ill-treated, since you also are in the body. **4** Let marriage be held in honour among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled; for God will judge the immoral and adulterous. **5** Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have; for he has said, 'I will never fail you nor forsake you.' **6** Hence we can confidently say,

**'The Lord is my helper,  
I will not be afraid;  
what can man do to me?'**

**7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God; consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith. **8** Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

### Reflection

**WE HAVE** reached the final chapter of the Letter to the Hebrews. As we saw at the outset, it may have been a sermon, originally, rather than a letter. Some have suggested that the abrupt change of gear from chapter 12 to chapter 13 might indicate that chapter 13 is an addition, perhaps from another source. Others see chapter 13 as drawing out and emphasising themes found earlier in the book. By this stage we have covered some complex theological argument and unscrambled some very dense imagery and, whatever the literary origins, it is something of a relief to find ourselves now looking at some very straightforward moral exhortation, such as one might find either in a letter or a sermon. We begin with *philadelphia*, the love felt between blood relatives and this is extended to caring for others. By doing this 'some have entertained angels unawares', a deservedly famous phrase, summing up the heart of Jesus' teaching in the parable of 'The Great Assize':

**And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me. (Mt 25:40)**

There are warnings about sexual morality, the love of money, and covetousness. These warnings are to be expected in the context of a sermon or letter which has sternly taught that there is no second repentance.

## **Saturday of Week 4 (1)**

### **Reading**

*Hebrews 13:15-17, 20-21*

### *Sacrifices well-pleasing to God*

<sup>15</sup> Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. <sup>16</sup> Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

<sup>17</sup> Obey your leaders and submit to them; for they are keeping watch over your souls, as men who will have to give account. Let them do this joyfully, and not sadly, for that would be of no advantage to you....

<sup>20</sup> Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, <sup>21</sup> equip you with everything good that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

<sup>22</sup> I appeal to you, brethren, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly. <sup>23</sup> You should understand that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon. <sup>24</sup> Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings. <sup>25</sup> Grace be with all of you. Amen.

### **Reflection**

**THE LEADERS**, whom the Letter mentioned yesterday (v.7) were those 'who spoke ... the word of God'. We were to 'consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith'. What was true remains true because 'Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever' (v.8). The final exhortation tells us to have respect for the leaders of today, whilst we offer a sacrifice of praise to God and practise good works (vv.15-16). Then, following a blessing, the Epistle to the Hebrews finishes with greetings, much as do the letters of St Paul, of which this book – letter or homily – was once thought to belong.