

3rd Sunday Ordinary time, 2020 – Feast of the Presentation of the Lord.

Yesterday was the end of the Christmas season. Today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Gospel story that was just read talks about the Presentation. Going back to about the 4th Century - so the 300s - a celebration took place on this day, the end of the Christmas season, where you would bring candles to church. The candles would be blessed, and then you'd use those candles for the rest of the year to light your homes. So it became known as Candle Mass Day, and that got contracted to Candlemas Day. Going forward from then, perhaps even before that, there was a custom of having reminders of one sort or another in one's home about the Gospel message. The candle was a representation of the light of Christ. And it had a practical purpose, of course. It provided light in the home throughout the rest of the year. So when you went into a Christian home in the 4th Century, you'd see the candles there. And that way you'd actually know that there was in that home a representation of Jesus. Then other developments began to take place to the point where up 'til fairly recently you'd go into a home that was Catholic, it was more specifically a Catholic practice than any other Christian denomination. And you'd find, for example, a picture of the Sacred Heart, a lot of times with a red lamp in front of it, or a picture of the Blessed Mother with a blue lamp in front of it, or a crucifix, or a statue of Mary or Joseph or Jesus or many of the saints. And that way you knew you were actually in a Catholic home.

Now a lot of that has gone by the wayside. We live in a society that's fundamentally secular. And unfortunately many of the older, Catholic practices like the statue of Mary or the Holy Water font that was inside the home, have gone by the wayside, and that's rather unfortunate. One of the interesting things for us in Atlanta in recent times, is that when St. Joseph's Hospital switched and went under the same umbrella as Emory University Hospital, the practice of having a crucifix in every room was retained. We have kind acquiesced in this secularization of our Catholic institutions and homes. And that's a shame, because part of the purpose of the prior practice was to have a reminder of the Gospel in our homes. I suggested over the Christmas season that people who don't have a crèche to display tear out of our parish calendar the December page, and put it on your refrigerator. It depicts the birth of Jesus. That way at least you have something of a Catholic nature in your home. In practice, something like that that draws our minds to some dimension of the faith. There is, then, a greater likelihood that that will become significant for us, and that we will, when we go out of that home, take some dimension of the Gospel with us.

So what I'd like to suggest today is that Lent is only a month away. When you go home today, take a look around your house, and see what's there that would cause a person coming into your home to say, "Oh, this person is Catholic." Or at least, at a minimum, this person is oriented toward the Gospel. And if there's nothing there, then go on the internet or go out and visit the bookstore at the Monastery in Conyers, and look around and pick out something that you can pick up, and take home, and put in your home to remind you of the fact that you are Catholic, to remind you of the fact that when you go outside that home you're supposed to take the Gospel with you so you can pass it along to other people. Now, this is not going to be an overnight project. That's why I say now that we've finished the Christmas season, and we're actually just a month from the Lenten season, we can use this period of time to get ourselves back into the practice of non-secular Catholic homes. Find something to put up in that home to remind you of

the fact that you have been called specifically and by name to be a disciple of Jesus, to be a person who will bring the message of the Gospel out into the world. This is a good time for us to start to make that a reality in our lives.