

“OF GROUNDHOGS & GRACE”

A Reflection on Sunday 31 January 2016

ROOTED IN NATURE – Wanting and needing to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, but not knowing the exact date of Jesus’ birth, our ancestors decided to celebrate the Nativity of the Lord on December 25 and in so doing “baptize” preexisting religious rites associated with the annual winter solstice.



QUARTERS & MID-QUARTERS – Most of us, I think, have some vague sense of nature’s **quarterly** markers about every 90 days (winter solstice; spring equinox; summer solstice; fall equinox). I suspect, though, that few of us are aware of nature’s **mid-quarter** markers such as the one we will mark this Tuesday (Feb. 2nd) as the earth reaches the mid-point in its 2016 journey between the winter solstice and the spring equinox.



GROUNDHOG DAY – This is the origin of tomorrow’s celebration of shadow and light known as **Groundhog Day**. As the days are getting longer and the nights shorter, we naturally wonder how much longer until we can really feel the warmth from the approaching sun. That said, this Tuesday Punxsautawney Phil will not be the only one concerned with the interplay between shadow and light.

DARKNESS & LIGHT – Superimposed on tomorrow’s celebration of the interplay of natural light and darkness, will be our Tradition’s annual celebration of the drama of light and darkness in our soul’s and on the world’s stage.



This Tuesday, 40 days after having celebrated the Birth of the Lord, we will celebrate the **Feast of the Presentation of the Lord** when Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the Temple for the first time.

Simeon recognizes Jesus as **the Light of the World** and tells Mary that her son “is destined for the rising and falling of many, and that he (Jesus) would be a sign that would be opposed” (Luke 2:34).

Dare we allow the Light who is Christ to illumine the parts of our own lives (as individuals and as groups) that are in the shadows? Psychologically some folks say that if we can discover our secrets we can discover our sickness, namely: those parts of us (as individuals and as groups) where we are stuck and where we repeat destructive behavior. By facing our shadow (as individuals and as groups), our hidden parts can be brought into the light and the door to healing and integration may be opened. Spiritually, our Catholic Tradition speaks of The Cross as the Tree of Life and of the process of the purification of desire.

THE PURIFICATION OF DESIRE – The second part of Simeon’s message is that Mary herself would be “pierced by a sword so that the **thoughts of many hearts may be laid bare**” (Luke 2:35). Sometimes we think that if we are blessed by God means then we won’t have to struggle, undergo hardship, or have our hearts broken. If Mary who is “full of grace” is not protected from suffering, then the unspoken covenant that lies deep in my heart is exposed and brought to the surface, to consciousness, namely: “God and I have this deal: If I do good, then I and those I love will be sheltered from suffering.” The revelation of the Cross is a sign that we all resist, oppose. And so we come

to the first and oldest name for Monday's feast: **the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary.**

Mary, the Prime Disciple will have her expectations exposed, realigned and purified. Being preserved from sin, being full of grace, being the Mother of God is no protection from having at times to suffer, to question, or having her heart broken. The crucified Christ resists multiple invitations to come down from his Cross. The Crucified Christ is a sign we all resist; a sign I oppose and do not want as God's Suffering Servant and his Mother lay bare some deep unspoken expectations that need to be purified by being brought out of the shadows and into the Light.

**We all have secret fears to face,
Our minds and motives to amend
We seek your truth, we need your grace,
Our living Lord and present Friend.**