

Rev. Kevin V. Madigan
Church of Our Lady of Good Counsel February 2, 2020
Solemnity of the Presentation of the Lord Luke 2:22-40

It may seem odd, but today, the Feast of the Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple, is actually the end of the Christmas Season. For most people the Christmas season is over when the tree is taken down, the presents returned to the store to be exchanged for the correct size or color, and hopefully the credit card bills paid off. Then one can breathe a sigh of relief that the "holiday season" is over. For the Church it is the forty days after Christmas that we are to reflect on the meaning of the Savior's birth. For the secular world it is the forty, or fifty or sixty days (every year it seems a bit longer) before Christmas that we have the "holiday season" that receive most of the attention.

Among some people there is the presumption, the expectation, that when the "holiday season" arrives, we in the church should get on board and decorate our interiors in the manner of Macy's or Bloomingdale's. Every year I have someone complain to me in the weeks leading up to Christmas that, because there is no festive greenery in the church, that the church doesn't look "Christmas-sy." To which I respond, that's because it's not Christmas yet. In the Church instead of a "holiday season," we have these four weeks called "Advent," wherein we are invited to reflect upon the theme of "waiting." In a society that puts so much emphasis on the immediate gratification of any impulse or drive, we need this time to integrate into our lives this sense of patient, hope-filled, attentive waiting. So, there is a reason why we wait for the last minute before Christmas before we set up the decorations. In fact, if you were to travel to Rome and visit St. Peter's Square, you would see the Christmas crèche still in place right there. It seems as if the secular world and the Church celebrate Christmas backwards. With the world, the emphasis is on the weeks before, the emphasis on buying, on commercialism; for the church, the emphasis is on the weeks after, a time given to us to ponder the meaning of Christ's birth.

But there is one theme that links these 40 days between Christmas and today's feast, and that is the theme of light. We heard in the prologue to St. John's Gospel that was read on Christmas Day, "In Him was life, and the light was the light of all mankind. The light shines in darkness and the darkness has not overcome it." Today we hear Jesus hailed by Simeon as the "light to the Gentiles." A few weeks ago on the feast of the Epiphany, we recalled how the Magi were led to the Savior by the light of a star. Last week we heard the prophecy of Isaiah of "a light shining on the people living in darkness." Today is the day when traditionally the candles are blessed that will be used during religious services throughout the coming year. Jesus is God's light in a

world that so often appears shrouded in darkness---the darkness of war, poverty, sickness, greed, violence. But the promise given to us by God is that Christ overcomes the darkness.

By our baptism we share in that divine light. Jesus said to his disciples and to us, "You are the light of the world." That is more than a slogan, like the advertising slogans we will hear during the commercial breaks during the Super Bowl this evening. Jesus means that we, by the conduct and quality of our lives, are to make a difference. We are called to be signs of hope amidst the darkness of a pervading cynicism, signs of integrity amidst corruption, signs of peace amidst rage and violence, signs of kindness and compassion amidst selfishness. It is all too easy to focus on the darkness that is all around, and then become discouraged. We ought to keep in mind that simple slogan, "Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness." The opportunities are all around us to make a difference. And each of us can make a difference. Let us pray that we can bring that light, that we can be that light.