

a Society of the Sacred Heart



January 29, 2011 Volume I

Christ's Light Conquers Winter Night: Feasts of St. Francis de Sales & Candlemas



Have you noticed that the nights are becoming shorter and the days are growing longer? Ever since Christmas Day, which occurs about the time of the Winter solstice, the

hours of daylight increase each day. As we approach the spring equinox, the Church brings the light of Christ to our darkness, the Church gives us two feast days full of spiritual light for our soul: the feast of St. Francis de Sales and Candlemas Day. Christ's light conquers winter night.

Now, we have all had our dark moments, haven't we? We know the darkness of difficulty and sorrow and the night of trial, dryness, discouragement. When you find yourself in a spiritual night, when cold and darkness surround you, look up at the stars, God has given you thousands upon thousands of bright stars to guide you in the right path--thousands upon thousands of

saints as stellar examples of how to get to Heaven. The saints are our light in the night. Read the lives of the saints, you will discover that they were real people like us. There is not one saint in heaven who did not experience moments of darkness.

St. Francis de Sales was no exception. As a young man, he endured a temptation of spiritual depression and despair. He couldn't eat or sleep. He felt abandoned by the God he loved. After six weeks of darkness, his prayers to Mary brought him the light of consolation. After six weeks of darkness, he was spiritually stronger. He had more confidence in God than ever before.

As a young missionary priest in hostile Calvinist country, he had no real success after a whole year of hard labor. No one would listen. He had no real help. The Catholic cause seemed lost in the darkness. He wrote a letter to a devout friend, Antoine Favre, expressing his torment of soul and his sense of helplessness. Admitting his human weakness, Francis felt like giving up. However, his devout friend Antoine encouraged him in this moment of darkness. And so, Francis kept on going in his priestly mission.

The young missionary wrote little pamphlets which he would slip under people's front doors. A few years later, he was writing books of great spiritual doctrine and then hundreds of letters, offering spiritual enlightenment to souls in need. This is why today's Liturgy calls Francis... a light for the whole Church. His doctrine is spiritual sunshine for the soul.

Are you new to the spiritual life? Read St. Francis de Sales. He will show you how a holy life is a happy life, how a devout life brings sunshine to those who sacrifice. Has your spiritual life become dry and difficult? Read St. Francis de Sales. He will be that devout friend who will encourage you. He will teach you patience and fortitude until those dark clouds of spiritual trial pass away. Reading St. Francis de Sales for just 5 minutes a day will bring spiritual sunshine to your soul.

The second feast the Church has given us to lighten up these dark winter nights is Candlemas Day. On this day when candles are solemnly blessed, we remember the presentation of Jesus in the temple. The prophet Simeon then spoke of Christ as a **Light to the nations**, but also as sign of contradiction. A spiritual battle between light and darkness had begun.

Do you remember the day of your baptism? On that day, just seconds after the priest baptized you with water, he gave a **candle** to your godparent, who spoke for you in your name. The priest said: "Receive this burning candle, and keep the grace of your baptism without stain."

That day you received a mission. You became a child of **light**. You were called to be candles, candles who bring the light of Christ to the world. "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven.

And years later, we must ask ourselves... How bright is that candle of baptismal grace burning within us? Are we truly living as children of light? We must allow the light of Christ to enlighten those little dark spots of our soul. We must bring to light those excuses we make for not doing things we know we should do. We must bring to light those underlying selfish motives for our actions, those little jealousies, the gossiping, those grudges. We must bring them to light so that the darkness does not engulf us. To be a child of light will not be easy for us today, and it may become more difficult in our world of tomorrow. But Candlemas reminds us that we are not alone in our darkness. We carry lighted candles in a liturgical procession. This symbolizes our mission as children of light. The light of Christ is with us. His light conquers winter night.

On Candlemas, take your candle home, place it at your bedside next to your book of St. Francis de Sales. You will be reminded that Christ's light will triumph over your darkness. All throughout Lent, that blessed candle of Candlemas will remind you of the Easter candle. After the darkness of Good Friday we will share in the joyful light of Easter Sunday. Thus the light of Candlemas, foretaste of the light of the Resurrection, also foretells the heavenly light of our own eternity. In heaven there will be no more darkness, the night will vanish forever.

But for now, it's up to us to live always and everywhere as children of light. Open the windows of your soul to receive the spiritual sunshine of St. Francis de Sales. After the trials and troubles of this life, the light of Candlemas shall be ours for all eternity.

Thoughts on the Rosary

James P. Sutherland, MD



I have, for several years, tried to make the recitation of the Rosary part of my daily devotions. I must confess that I am not always successful, but it is definitely an important part of my prayer life, not only as a Catholic but as a Catholic father. All of us, I'm sure are familiar with the mysteries of the Rosary and how to recite the prayers. There are a few things that I would like to share about reciting the Rosary for fathers.

One of the things that assists me in my paternal recitation of the Rosary is, at the beginning of each decade, to think of one of my children in particular. It is easy, while recalling the mystery for a particular decade, to bring to mind one of my children and what the spiritual or physical needs of that child are. Perhaps that child is facing certain academic challenges at school, or is struggling with issues of the Faith, or is, perhaps, discerning a vocation. As I recall the mystery for the decade, I simply take whatever the needs of that child, both known and unknown, to their Heavenly Mother and rest assured that she will intercede on their behalf. In my case, it works out well because I have five children, so a daily recitation of five decades covers the needs of everyone, ranging from my oldest who is a sophomore in college to the youngest who has just started the first grade.

Certainly the Rosary is a prayer of the Gospel, for the Mysteries that are recalled are either mentioned directly in scripture or are inferred from it (the Assumption and the Queenship of Mary). As I recall to mind the mystery associated with each decade, I not only meditate on the specifics of that particular mystery—say Mary visiting her cousin, Elizabeth—but I also consider the role and influence of St. Joseph to the mysteries. Certainly, St. Joseph was alive during the events recalled in the Joyful Mysteries. However, as we know of St. Joseph, he was humble and cared for the Holy Family, providing for them and leading them yet remaining in the background. This is, perhaps, a worthy reflection for a Catholic father and his role in the family—to live his role as Catholic husband and father humbly, dedicating his life to the service, care and protection of his family. Although we do not know exactly at what point during the life of Jesus that St. Joseph died, he is not mentioned in Scripture during the events of the Sorrowful, Glorious or Luminous Mysteries. However, we should have every reason to believe that as a good husband to Mary and foster father to Jesus, St. Joseph would have intervened on their behalf as he was spiritually able.

I think, at times, as I recite the decades, of my own father who has been gone for fourteen years now. I know that he died with the Sacraments, having received the Viaticum before his passing, and I am confident, within my feeble human understanding, that he is interceding on my behalf and on behalf of my mother and my siblings, from either Purgatory or from Heaven as he is able. He was a good Catholic father—not perfect, but a model to emulate.

One hears people complain about praying the Rosary because they feel that the recitation of the same prayers over and over is “boring”. However, the depth of the meditations available during this prayer of the Gospel is endless and worthy of reflection and persistence.



Saint Francis de Sales

1567-1622

“Nothing is so strong as gentleness, nothing is so gentle as true strength.”

Born in 1564 of aristocratic Savoyard parents, the young Francis was destined to the magistracy according to his father’s wishes. During his studies in Paris, he was afflicted with a terrible and prolonged temptation to despair. He was suddenly delivered while praying before a miraculous image of Our Lady and made a vow of chastity and consecrated himself to the Blessed Virgin Mary. After his studies in Padua (1588), Francis was admitted as a lawyer before the Savoyard senate where he was about to be appointed senator. His father had selected one of the noblest heiresses of Savoy to be the partner of his future life, but Francis declared his intention of embracing the ecclesiastical life. Finally his father yielded, and Francis received Holy Orders (1593).

In the following year (1594) he volunteered to evangelize Le Chablais, where the Genevans had imposed the Reformed Faith. Risking his life, he journeyed through the entire district, preaching constantly; by dint of zeal, learning, kindness and holiness he at last obtained a hearing. He confuted the preachers sent by Geneva to oppose him; he converted several prominent Calvinists. A large part of the inhabitants of Le Chablais returned to the true fold (1597 and 1598).

Consecrated Bishop of Geneva in 1602, his first step was to institute catechetical instructions for the faithful, both young and old. He made prudent regulations for the guidance of his clergy and reformed religious communities. He carefully visited the parishes scattered through the rugged mountains of his diocese. The goodness, patience and mildness of our saint became proverbial. He had an intense love for the poor, especially those who were of respectable family. His food was plain, his dress and his household simple. He completely dispensed with superfluities and lived with the greatest economy, in order to be able to provide more abundantly for the wants of the needy. He heard confessions, gave advice, and preached incessantly.

Together with St. Jane Frances de Chantal he founded (1607) the Institute of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin, for young girls and widows who, feeling themselves called to the religious life, have not sufficient strength, or lack inclination, for the corporal austerities of the great orders. After many apostolic labors, Francis died in 1622 at the age of fifty-six. He was canonized in 1665 and declared Doctor of the Universal Church by Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1877. He is patron saint of journalists and Catholic writers. Blessed Pius IX, in his Bull proclaiming him Doctor of the Church calls the Saint "The Master and Restorer of Sacred Eloquence". *"The writings of Francis de Sales, filled with celestial doctrine are a bright light in the Church, pointing out to souls an easy and safe way to arrive at the perfection of a Christian life."* --*Breviarium Romanum*

Enlightening the Darkness: Christ at Candlemas

February 2: forty days after Christmas



What does this Feast Commemorate?

Purification of the Blessed Virgin: ritual of the “churching of women”

Candlemas, commemorates the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary. According to Mosaic law, a mother who had given birth was considered unclean and in need of a ritual of purification 40 days after giving birth. As the Virgin Mother of the Son of God, Mary did not need purification, but humbly submitted to the law through holy obedience.

Christian mothers today imitate Mary in the traditional practice of a ceremony called the “*Churching of women*.” Although it is not a “purification” ceremony, churching is the woman's way of giving thanksgiving to God for the birth of her child, and predisposes her, through the priestly blessing that is a part of the ritual, to receive the graces necessary to raise her child in a manner pleasing to God. As the mother kneels at the communion rail holding a lighted candle, the priest prays:

Almighty, everlasting God, through the delivery of the blessed Virgin Mary, Thou hast turned into joy the pains of the faithful in childbirth; look mercifully upon this Thy handmaid, coming in gladness to Thy temple to offer up her thanks: and grant that after

this life, by the merits and intercession of the same blessed Mary, she may merit to arrive, together with her offspring, at the joys of everlasting happiness. Through Christ our Lord.

Presentation of the Child Jesus in the Temple

St. Luke tells us, quoting the Book of Exodus, that Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem because every firstborn child was to be dedicated to the Lord. They also went to sacrifice a pair of doves or two young pigeons, showing that Mary and Joseph were poor. The holy priest Simeon, upon seeing the Messiah, gave thanks to the Lord, singing a hymn now called the *Nunc Dimittis*:

Now Thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord, according to Thy word in peace; Because my eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel.

Simeon told Mary, “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against, and a sword will pierce through thy own soul.” Simeon thus foreshadowed the crucifixion and the sorrows of Mary at seeing the death of her Son. Christ shall be a sign of contradiction. A struggle between the children of light and those of darkness will ensue.

History of Candlemas

Egeria, writing around AD 380, attests to a feast of the Presentation in the church at Jerusalem forty days after the celebration of Christmas. In 542, the Emperor Justinian introduced the feast to the entire Eastern Roman empire in thanksgiving for the end to a great pestilence afflicting the city of Constantinople. A few decades later, Pope St. Gregory the Great (590- 604) brought the feast to Rome. Pope Sergius (687-701) introduced the procession to the Candlemas service. The blessing of candles did not come into common use throughout the West until the 11th century.

Liturgy and its symbolism

Blessing and symbolism of the candle

Ceremony--The candle blessing -- one of 3 principle blessings of the liturgical year, the others being the blessing of palms & ashes -- will be given by the priest wearing a cope. Standing at epistle side of the altar, the priest chants 5 prayers before sprinkling the candles 3 times with holy water. The candles are incensed.

Symbolism--How does the candle symbolize Christ: St. Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury exhorts us to consider three things in the blessed Candle: the wax, the wick, and the flame. The wax, he says, which is the production of the virginal bee, is the Flesh of

our Lord; the wick, which is within, is His Soul; the flame, which burns on top, is His divinity. "In him was life, and the life was the light of men." *John 1:4* The flame which gives both light and heat is a sign of the divine life of God.

In the New Testament, the flame also represents the divine love of charity. "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. But He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light, and there is no scandal in him." *1 Jn 2:9-10* Thus the flame of the candle reminds us of our duty to practice charity: "So let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven." *Mt 5:16* "For the fruit of the light is in all goodness, and justice, and truth." *Eph 5:9*

Distribution of candles

Next the celebrant distributes them to the clergy and laity, while the choir sings the canticle of Simeon, *Nunc dimittis*. When we take a blessed candle from the priest's hand, we kiss the candle and then the priest's hand, just as we do on Palm Sunday. (During the Mass, the lighted candles are held during the reading of the Gospel and from the beginning of the Canon of the Mass to the Communion of the priest.)

Procession and its symbolism

Ceremony-- There follows a procession with the lighted candles and the chanting of

anthems. The cross goes in front, followed by the clergy and the celebrant. The faithful walk behind the celebrant carrying their newly-blessed candles. The church bells ring out in joy.

Symbolism--A Liturgical procession is an image of our whole life on earth. A procession reminds us that our whole life on earth is a homeward pilgrimage—we walk to Heaven. Each procession in the Liturgical Year not only honors an event in the life of Christ, thereby giving us new grace in our pilgrim journey to Heaven, but is also meant to instill in us a spiritual attitude about how to live our daily life.

The Candlemas procession represents the entry of Christ the Light of the World, into the Temple of Jerusalem. It reminds us that the baptized faithful must walk as children of light. St. Paul also: "For you were darkness before, but now light in the Lord. Walk then as children of the light." *Ephes 5:8* Jesus said: "*Yet a little while, the light is among you. Walk whilst you have the light, that the darkness overtake you not. Whilst you have the light, believe in the light, that you may be children of light.*" *Jn 12:35-36*

During the procession we can meditate on the struggle which we all experience between the light and the darkness. The light of Christ brings hope of His victory to our lives: "*And the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.*"

The church bells ring out during the procession to celebrate the light of Christ and foretell His final triumph over the darkness—triumph which is only a matter of time.

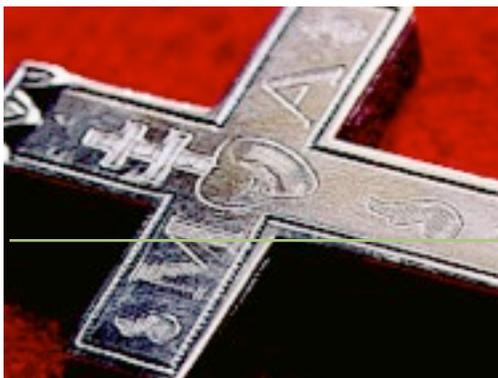


Thus the candlelight procession also symbolizes our entrance into the eternal light of Heaven—the church bells and Chants during the procession make us think of the heavenly experience which will be our reward for the blood, sweat, and tears of the earthly journey. *“And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign forever and ever. His servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face: and his name shall be on their foreheads. And night shall be no more: and they shall not need the light of the lamp, nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God shall enlighten them, and they shall reign forever and ever.”*
Apocalypse 22:3-5

The Cross of St. Francis de Sales

Many of us have received the Cross of St. Francis de Sales as professed members of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Looking closely, it is obvious that there is no corpus on the cross. That is because we, as members of the Society, are to be the body upon that cross--as St. Paul says, to “fill up those things which are wanting in the Passion of Christ.” The cross is also worn by the Priests of the Institute, the Oblates, and the Sister Adorers of the Sacred Heart. In sharing this honor with the professed religious members of the Institute, we should know and remember that we are, in a very real and complete sense, members of the family of the Institute of Christ

the King Sovereign Priest. We share in the spiritual benefits of the Masses offered by our Priests, we are of service--albeit in a different way, as are fraternal Oblates, and our intentions are remembered in the powerful intercessory prayers of our Sisters. We are, in every real and complete sense, members of this community as a “lay” or “third” order.



Wearing of the Cross

We should take every appropriate opportunity to wear the cross in which we have been invested. The cross may be worn on the following occasions:

- At Low Mass or High Mass, on Sundays and Feast Days when attending a church of the Institute
- At liturgical functions such as Lauds or Vespers, or Benediction
- At organized meetings and retreats of the Society
- It may be worn at home when reciting the Divine Office or Rosary with our spouse or family

Let us do so with reverence and humility as it helps to unite us in a real and concrete way to the other members of the Institute of Christ the King Sovereign Priest.

Mark your calendars: Annual Retreat Dates have been scheduled for the weekend of June 17-19, 2011, at the Shrine of Christ the King in Chicago.

Canon Matthew Talarico
Chaplain, Society of the Sacred Heart

James P. Sutherland, Jr., MD
Governor General for the United States