

37// HERE FOLLOWETH THE PURIFICATION OF OUR LADY¹

*Postquam impleti sunt dies purgationis Marie secundum legem Moisi, tulerunt Jesum in Jerusalem. Lucae, cap. ii.*²

The ancient law had his course until the time that God hath suffered death for us. And when he died on the cross he said, *Joh. cap. xix. Consummatum est*, that is to say, “All thing is finished and ended that hath been written of me.”³ Which law he kept during his life, as it is written, “I am not come for to break the law,”⁴ in which he gave us example of humility and of obedience, like as St. Paul saith.⁵

In like wise our Lady, for to obey to the law, bare her sweet son Jesu Christ unto the temple of Jerusalem after the fortieth day of his birth, for to offer him to God, and for to give offering for him such as in the law was ordained, that is to wit, a pair of turtles [turtledoves] or two doves was the offering of poor folk, like as it is written.

Our Lord, which in all case came to make our salvation, deigned not only to humble himself and descend from his realm, and became man mortal, semblable [similar] to us. Also he deigned to be born of a poor woman, and was poor for to enrich us, and draw us out of the misery of this world to the riches permanable [enduring].

THE SIGNIFICATION OF THE TURTLEDOVES AND THE DOVES

And we that be poor because of our sins, and without riches of good virtues, so worthily should we come and be at the feast of our Lord, we should offer to him that which by the offering is signified. The dove which is of her nature simple [innocent] and without gall, and the turtle naturally chaste, for when she hath lost her mate she will never have other mate, and with that she taketh the weeping for her song. We ought to offer to our Lord instead of two doves, one simple will and a good intention, without retaining in our heart any gall of anger or of hate towards our neighbour; for as our Lord saith, if thine eye be simple all thy works shall be in light.⁶

¹ This version of Caxton’s differs considerably from that found in William Granger Ryan’s authoritative translation.

² “And when the days of her purification according to the law of Moses were accomplished, they brought him to Jerusalem.” – Luke 2:22, cf. Exodus 13:2, 12 and Leviticus 12:8.

³ John 19:30.

⁴ “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” – Matthew 5:17.

⁵ “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” – Philippians 2:8.

⁶ “The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light.” – Matthew 6:22.

And hereof saith St. John the Evangelist in the Apocalypse, “The city needeth no sun ne moon to shine in it, for the clearness of God shall illumine it, and his lantern is the lamb; the lamb is the light.”⁷ By the lamb, which is simple, is signified to us a simple conscience and righteous, which maketh true judgment of the intention.

For all works be good or evil. If they be done in evil intention or by hypocrisy they be evil and without profit, like as saith Jesu Christ, “If thine eye be evil, all thy body shall be dark.”⁸ By the eye is understood the intention, with goodness simple, and debonairty [meekness] is signified by the doves.

We ought also to offer a pair of turtles to our Lord, that is to say, a chaste life and a very [true] intention to leave our sins, the which is signified to us by the chastity of the turtle, and by her weeping the contrition. As Bede saith: Contrition ought to begin in dread and end in love; for the soul faithful, when she remembereth her sins in her conscience, she weepeth for the dread of the pains of hell that she hath deserved, and thus offereth she to God a turtle; and when she hath wept, there cometh to her a hope to have mercy and pardon of her sins, and this hope is conceived of dread in him and love of God, to serve and to be in his company; so that soul that ought to sing, weepeth for love, which hath delivered her so soon from the perils and miseries of this world, and for to come to the sweet company of our Lord.

And thus offered she that other turtle, in weeping with David the prophet the long pilgrimages that she hath made in the miseries of this world saying: *Heu me quia incolatus meus prolongatus est;*⁹ for when she beginneth to think after the joyous company of angels, and of the souls that be in heaven, and what joy and deuit [delight] that they have in the over desirous sight of our Lord, then all the world grieveth them, and they desire to be delivered from the faits [deeds?] of the body for to go into the company of these holy souls.

SIMEON’S WORDS IN THE TEMPLE

And also that St. Simeon, which by revelation of the Holy Ghost came into the temple of Jerusalem in the same hour that the blessed Virgin brought her dear son for to offer him, and the Holy Ghost had showed to him, that tofore that he should die corporally he should see Jesu Christ come in to the earth, the which birth he knew long before to be showed by the prophets. And when he saw Jesu Christ brought into the temple, anon he knew him by the Holy Ghost to be very [true] God and very man, and took him between his arms and said: “Fair Lord God let thy sergeant and servant from henceforth be in peace, and suffer that after this revelation showed to me, I may depart and die for to be delivered from the evils of this world, for mine eyes corporal and spiritual have seen thy blessed son Jesu Christ, which shall save the creatures human from their sins; the which thou hast made ready and ordained tofore the face of all creatures human, for to be light to all people by his doctrine, to illumine and take away

⁷ “The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp.” – Revelation 21:23.

⁸ “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” – Matthew 6:23.

⁹ “My soul has dwelt too long with one who hates peace” – Psalm 120:6. The Vulgate (119:5) has “heu mihi quia peregrinatio mea prolongata est habitavi cum tabernaculis.”

darknesses.” (That is to say, of their idolatry, after this that Isaiah the prophet hath prophesied of him: *Populus gentium qui ambulabat in tenebris*,¹⁰ etc., the people of gentiles or paynims [pagans] which walked in darkness to worship idols and devils for very God, saw a great light when they issued from their sins by the doctrine of Jesu Christ which came also to the glory of the Jews, for they received his sight bodily, like as was promised them by the witness of the prophets, by which they might glorify them of this, that their rightful King was born among them and conversed bodily in their country.)

And St. Simeon said, *Nunc dimittis servum tuum domine, etc.* “Sire, let thy servant depart in peace after thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy health, which thou hast made ready tofore the face of all peoples.” (That is light to the revelation of paynims and to the glory of thy people of Israel. Jesu Christ is called peace, health, light and joy. Peace, because that he is our moyen [mediator] and our advocate; health, for he is our redeemer; light, for he is our informer [teacher]; and glory, for he is our governor.)

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE CANDLE

This feast is called Candlemas, and is made in remembrance of the offering that our Lady offered in the temple as said is, and every each beareth this day a candle of wax burning, which representeth our Lord Jesu Christ. Like as the candle burning hath three things in it, that is to wit, the wax, the wick, and the fire, right so be three things in Jesu Christ, that is the body, the soul and the godhead. For the wax which is made of the bee purely, without company and mixture of one bee with another, signifieth the body of our Lord Jesu Christ, and the fire of the candle signifieth the divinity of our Lord Jesu Christ, which illumineth all creatures.

And therefore if we will appear in this feast tofore the face of God, pure and clean and acceptable, we ought to have in us three things which be signified by the candle burning: that is good deeds, true faith, with good works. And like as the candle without burning is dead, right so faith is dead without works as St. James saith,¹¹ for to believe in God without obeying his commandments profiteth nothing. And therefore saith St. Gregory: The good work ought to show withoutforth that thy intention abide good withinforth the heart, without seeking within any vain glory to be allowed and praised. And by the fire is understood charity, of which God saith: I am come to put fire in the earth, and whom I will, I will burn.

WHY THE FEAST IS CALLED THE PURIFICATION

This feast is called the purification of our Lady, not for that she had need ne ought make her purification, for she was pure and clean without having of any tatche [stain] of deadly sin ne venial, like as she that had, without company of any man, by the virtue of the Holy Ghost, conceived the Son of God, and was delivered without losing of her virginity, so she came with her blessed son at the fortieth day after his nativity for to obey the commandment of the law, after the manner of other women which had need of purification, and also for to show to us the example of humility. He is very humble that is worthy to be praised for his virtues. This glorious

¹⁰ “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned” – Isaiah 9:2.

¹¹ “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead” – James 2:26.

Lady is queen of heaven and Lady of angels, nevertheless she is pure and humble among the women like as a poor woman, without making any semblant of her great humility, ne of the high majesty of her son, whereof St. Bernard saith in this manner:

O who may make us to understand, glorious Lady, the thought of thine heart that thou haddest among the services that thou madest to thy blessed son in giving him suck, in laying down and raising, when thou sawest a little child of thee born on that one part, and of that other side thou knewest him to be God Almighty? And now thou believest and seest him created that had created all the world, now thou seest him feeble as a child which is Almighty and all puissant [omnipotent], now thou feedest him that all the world feedeth, and now thou seest him not speaking, that made man and speech. O who should con [be able to] show hereupon the secrets of thine heart? How savoured thy courage [heart] when thou heldest thy child between thine arms whom thou lovedest as thy Lord, and kissed him as thy son. Who should not marvel of this miracle, when a virgin and a clean maid hath enfanted and childed her maker and Lord of all the world? To him let us address our thoughts, and embrace we this child of one very belief, whom we ought to love because he hath humbled himself for us, and to doubt [fear] him, because he is our judge and our Lord, to whose commandments we owe to obey if we will be saved.

THE DREAM OF THE CANDLE

We read an example of a noble lady which had great devotion in the blessed Virgin Mary, and she had a chapel in which she did do say mass of our Lady [had the Mass of Our Lady said] daily by her chaplain. It happed that the day of the purification of our Lady, her chaplain was out, so that this lady might that day have no mass, and she durst not go to another church because she had given her mantle unto a poor man for the love of our Lady. She was much sorrowful because she might hear no mass and for to make her devotions she went into the chapel, and tofore the altar she kneeled down for to make her prayers to our Lady. And anon she fell asleep, in which she had a vision

And her seemed [it seemed to her] that she was in a church, and saw come into the church a great company of virgins, tofore whom she saw come a right noble virgin crowned right preciously. And when they were all set each in order, came a company of young men which sat down each after other in order like the other; after, entered one that bare a burden of candles, and departed them to them above first, and so to each of them by order he gave one, and at the last came this man to this lady aforesaid and gave to her also a candle of wax.

The which lady saw also come a priest, a deacon and a subdeacon, all revested [wearing church vestments], going to the altar as for to say mass. And her seemed that St. Laurence and St. Vincent were deacon and sub-deacon, and Jesu Christ the priest, and two angels bearing tofore them candles.

And two young angels began the introit [the introductory prayer] of the mass, and all the company of the virgins sang the mass. And when the mass was sung unto the offering,¹² her seemed that thilk [the same] virgin so crowned went tofore, and after [after that] all the others followed, and offered to the priest, kneeling much devoutly, their candles.

And when the priest tarried for this lady that she should also have come to the offering, the glorious queen of virgins sent to her to say that she was not courteous to make the priest so long to tarry for her. And the lady answered that the priest should proceed in his mass forth, for she would keep her candle and not offer it. And the glorious virgin sent yet once to her, and she said she would not offer her candle. The third time the queen said to the messenger, “Go and pray her that she come and offer her candle, or else take it from her by force.”

The messenger came to this lady, and because in no wise she would not come and offer up her candle, he set hand on the candle that this lady held and drew fast, and she held fast, and so long he drew and haled [tugged] that the candle brake in two pieces, and that one half abode still in the hand of the lady aforesaid, which anon awoke and came to herself, and found the piece of the candle in her hand. Whereof she much marvelled, and thanked our Lord and the glorious Virgin Mary devoutly which had suffered her that day not to be without mass.

And all the days of her life after she kept that piece of that candle much preciously, like an holy relic, and all they that were touched therewith were guerished and healed of their maladies and sicknesses.

Let us pray then humbly to the glorious Virgin Mary, which is comfort to them that forsake their sins, that she will make our peace to the blessed Son and impetre [beseech] and get of him remission of all our sins, and after this life to come to the glory and joy of heaven, to the which bring us the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The [iconography of the Purification](#) is available at the [Christian iconography website](#).

For other saints, see the [index to this Golden Legend website](#).

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¹² The procession in which the faithful bring their offerings to the front of the church.

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