

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Dear Parishioners and friends who visit our website,

Two years ago on 2 February, the Feast of the Purification (Candlemas), I was inducted as parish priest at Our Lady & St. Anne, Caversham. The years have gone by quickly (every one of my age makes this observation, regardless) but they have been full of event. Moreover, they have been very happy and, having inherited a parish in excellent state of repair, I feel as a community we are still doing very well. Whether as a layman for all but forty years and as a priest for all but twenty-nine, I have always enjoyed going/coming to church.

The Purification is certainly a feast which radiates joy: the joy of Simeon at feeling at last, through having seen the Messiah with his own eyes, he can slip peacefully away from life that is weighted down with the burden of years; the joy of Hannah, who has lived in the Temple precincts the greater part of her life, who now had really good news to tell everyone – the deliverance of Jerusalem has come at last! I think too that in the Presentation story related to us by the evangelist Luke we find a serene Virgin Mary together with Joseph, offering their Son to his God. Joy is at the heart of the Christian experience; we are encouraged by the Church to spread the Good News by word and deed quite simply because it is *good news*. And I can only hope that in a parish where that Good News is proclaimed week-in, week-out, and where the Word is broken with the people by so many who read the Scriptures for us so clearly and so well, that the joy of the Christian message is infectious. [We are learning a lot about infection, and its potential day by day, as news comes in from a China under siege of the Coronavirus, and our prayers are with the Chinese people in these difficult times. But we know that the image of *infection* also has its positive side and it is in this regard that we use the term of the Gospel].

It seems to me that the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord is as good a time as any to start telling people that the Christian faith brings light into their lives (we bless today the candles we will be using in the liturgy throughout the year) and that it is a constant benefit to their lives. For many, religion has been seen as a burden, religious rituals as something to be endured, and the whole business of religious faith a dampener on the enjoyment of life. For us who simply could not live without the faith, the contrary is true. Let this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord, commemorating an event in the life of the infant Jesus which brought such joy to all involved in it, inspire us to diffuse far and wide the *good news* that is the Gospel.

Father Patrick