

**Christ Our Light**  
**5<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time (B)**  
**(Mk 1:29-39)**

Two days ago was the Feast of the Presentation, the day on which we blessed all the candles for the parish during the upcoming year. These include the altar candles, sanctuary lamps, congregation candles, as well as the votive candles used on feast days and in personal devotion.<sup>1</sup> Like the cross, candles are an important Christian symbol, representing Christ who is the “light of the world” as well as the grace he brings.<sup>2</sup>

This feastday, occurring 40 days from Christmas, corresponds with the first Sundays of Ordinary Time in which the early ministry of Jesus is outlined in the Gospels. Jesus comes as a “light” to the world, and he deliberately establishes his public ministry in the region which has “fallen into darkness.” Jesus, the Messiah, who hails from King David’s tribe of Judah (in the south), does not reveal the Kingdom of God in the Holy City Jerusalem until the very end. Instead, he spends almost all of his public ministry in the north, in Galilee, establishing the Kingdom of God in the territory of the lost tribes of Israel. St. Matthew, quoting a prophecy of Isaiah, explains why this is the case:

“[After his baptism at the river Jordan, near Jericho,] when he heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee [in the north]; and leaving Nazareth [where he had grown up] he went and dwelt in [the fishing village of] Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of [the lost tribes of] Zebulun and Naphtali, that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah [Is 9:1-2] might be fulfilled: ‘Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali, toward the sea across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned’” (Mt 4:12-16).

Jesus established his headquarters in Capernaum, the village of Simon Peter and Andrew, and stayed in the house of Simon.<sup>3</sup> However, he was not there much, as St. Mark explains. Jesus was constantly on the move, travelling to all the towns and villages throughout the region, and often seeking out desolate places to pray.

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<sup>1</sup> The Paschal Candle (Easter Candle), which is the most important of all the liturgical candles, is solemnly blessed by itself during the Easter Vigil.

<sup>2</sup> As with all things sacred and liturgical, we avoid artificial or cheap materials, and use only the best nature has to offer. We therefore do not use synthetic petroleum-based candles in church, such as are sold in the local grocery store. We use candles made from beeswax.

<sup>3</sup> Capernaum, abandoned some centuries after Christ following a devastating earthquake, has been rediscovered in the past century and today is an archaeological park in the care of the Franciscans. Amazingly, the entire village with its original footprint of buildings is preserved. One can sit in the very synagogue mentioned in today’s Gospel, and visit Simon Peter’s house, which was converted into a church by the first Christians.

Jesus had a mission, and this was to gather the lost tribes of Israel into the Kingdom of God (Mt 15:24, 10:5-6), bringing light to a region that had fallen into darkness. There are several important ways Jesus is the Light.

Wherever Jesus went, he would *teach*, or preach (Mk 1:39). Ignorance is a darkness, a blindness. The proclamation of the Gospel reveals God, explains man's situation, and the manner of his salvation. Christ is the Light because he shows the way to eternal life: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (Jn 14:6).

Wherever Jesus went, he would *expel demons*. We saw this last Sunday (Mk 1:23-27), and again in the Gospel today (Mk 1:34,39). Jesus confronts the "prince of darkness" in the land which he has overshadowed with death, overthrowing his dominion and establishing the Kingdom of God.

And wherever Jesus went, he would *heal*, bringing graces to restore the damage inflicted by evil on human nature. In today's Gospel he heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:30-31).

The Church now continues the work of Christ. Her mission is to the lost tribes of all mankind, seeking them out and gathering all nations to the Kingdom of God. It is not just the northern tribes of Israel that have fallen into darkness. Since the time of Noah and Babel, all the nations of the world have fallen under the dominion of evil. Like Christ, the Church brings light to all mankind through the Gospel, the authority of the Sacraments, and the healing ministry of service to the afflicted.

To complete the Feast of the Presentation (February 2<sup>nd</sup>) in which Christ our Light is acknowledged, the Church therefore unleashes his healing graces through the "Blessing of Throats" (February 3<sup>rd</sup>). St. Blase has the honor of hosting this blessing,<sup>4</sup> but its true significance is found in its use of candles blessed the previous day. As Christ the Light was revealed in Galilee through miracles of healing, so the Church's preaching of the Gospel continues to be accompanied by graces which overcome illness.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Through the intercession of St. Blase, bishop and martyr, may Almighty God deliver you from every disease of the throat and every other illness, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

<sup>5</sup> And as a reminder in this age where the roles of laity and clergy often become confused or blurred... While laity can, under extraordinary circumstances of necessity, assist the clergy in the distribution of Holy Communion; and while laity can always offer intercessory prayer ("May God bless us..."); in no way can laity impart ecclesial blessings. The non-ordained can *never* give the blessing of throats, for instance.