



# Stronica Proboszcza

## The Pastor's Page

February 2<sup>nd</sup>, MMXX

Feast of the Presentation of the Lord – Candlemas Day

Rev. Mark A. Borkowski

*Month of the Holy Passion of Our Lord*

FmarkB@aol.com

---

### Niech będzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus! Praised be Jesus Christ!

**S**unday, February 2<sup>nd</sup> is the 40th day after Christmas day. For people of Polish descent who faithfully observe their ethnic customs, it is the last day of the Christmas Season. This holy time of year always comes to an end with a very important Church Feast, The Presentation of Our Lord in the Temple. On this special day we commemorate Mary and Joseph bringing the child Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem for the first time, 40 days after His birth. According to the ancient Law of Moses, every Jewish mother was excluded from attendance at public worship for 40 days after giving birth to a boy child. Mary fulfilled this command of the law by presenting two pigeons as a sin offering and through the prayers of a priest was purified from the ritual uncleanness associated with childbirth. This feast day, therefore, was formerly called the Purification of Mary.

Today the feast is commonly known as Candlemas Day because of the blessing of candles which takes place at the beginning of Mass. The lighted candles are carried in procession in church to remind us that it is Jesus Christ who is the true Light of the World, a Revelation to all the nations and the glory of the People of Israel.

In Poland this day is called *Matki Boskiej Gromnicznej* which is translated literally as *Mother of God of the Thunder Candle*. The candles blessed this day are called *gromnicy* or *thunder candles* because they are kept in the home for use especially in time of thunderstorms to protect the house from being hit by lightning. They are also a protection against other natural calamities such as floods, fire and drought. The blessed candles are also lit at the bedside of the dying to protect the individual from Satan, and to light the way to heaven. It was believed by many that at the time of death there was a contest for the soul of the dying between angels and the devil.

At the Seminary in Orchard Lake there is a beautiful painting hanging in one of the halls which depicts Mary walking at night through the snows of the Polish countryside, carrying a large candle in her hands as if it was a sword. At her feet wolves can be seen running fearfully away from her and from the small cottages of the townsfolk she is protecting. Polish legend says she walks across Poland with her *gromnica* aglow, protecting homes and farm animals from many packs of hungry wolves, that prowl about looking for prey during the harsh Polish winters.

Even though we do not live in rural Poland but rather in the modern city of Wyandotte, on this occasion I encourage us all to invoke the Blessed Virgin for her help and protection on one of her special feast days. May Mary continue to protect each one of us from the dangers that roam the dark streets or our city at night during the remainder of this winter.

## ***Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup> – the Feast of St. Blaise, Bishop & Martyr***

St. Blaise was the bishop of Sebaste in Armenia. He was martyred during the persecution of Christians by the Roman emperor Lucinius. Blaise is said to have been a physician as well as a bishop. A legend tells that Blaise saved the life of a boy who was choking on a fish bone. Blaise is now the patron saint of all who have diseases of the throat. On his feast day in many parishes of the United States, people have their throats blessed. It's no surprise that this custom coincides with the peak of the sore throat and flu season. Years ago, wintertime illnesses were very dangerous. Before the discovery of penicillin, a person could die from complications of a sore throat. The tradition of blessing throats began at a time when the church's calendar was filled with blessings for the saints' days. Many of these are no longer practiced, but somehow the custom of blessing throats survived. Two candles are tied in the shape of a cross, and the candles are touched to our necks. We can think of the blessing of our throats as a sign of God's care for every part of us.

## **Wednesday, February 5<sup>th</sup> – the Feast of St. Agatha**

St. Agatha died at Catania, on the island of Sicily, during the early Roman persecutions of the Emperor Decius. Her tomb can still be visited in a network of catacombs on another island, Malta. After her capture she is said to have told her torturers, "To be a servant of Christ is to be truly free."

Agatha is one of the patrons of Sicily. For many centuries, Sicilians have prayed to St. Agatha when Mount Etna, a volcano on their island, threatens to erupt. Like many other early martyrs, Agatha is known to us only by her death. Stories about her life were not written down until several centuries later, so we have no way of knowing whether or not they are true. One says that in 251, the year of her death, she rejected the advances of a Roman senator, Quintianus. He spitefully accused her of following Christianity, and ordered her breasts cut off, but through the intercession of St. Peter they were miraculously restored. Another says that an attempt by the authorities to burn this beautiful maiden at the stake failed when it was interrupted by a volcanic eruption, so they cut off her head. What we do know about Agatha, though, is that she must have been a person of outstanding faith and courage. We can tell this because she was held in such high esteem by the other Christians of her own community. She was martyred for Christ, the one she loved before all others.

Agatha continues to be held in esteem. She is mentioned in the first Eucharistic Prayer, the Roman Canon of the Mass. In the sixth century two churches in Rome were given her name. Famous mosaics at Ravenna in Italy portray legendary scenes from her life.

## **Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup> – Feast of Blessed Pope Pius IX**

Pope Pius IX was born on May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1792 in Senigallia, Italy. At that time this area was called the Papal States. He was baptized on the day of his birth with the name Giovanni(John) Maria(Mary). His family name was Mastai-Ferretti. He was the ninth child born in his family and suffered from epilepsy. While studying for the priesthood in Rome it was predicted of him by St. Vincent Palotti that he would be cured of his epilepsy by the Blessed Virgin of Loreto and that one day he would become Pope.

He was ordained a priest in 1819, and then consecrated a bishop in 1827. Pope Gregory XVI made him a cardinal in 1840 and in 1846 he was elected Pope after Gregory died. His reign of 32 years was the second longest, but perhaps the most troubled in history. The anti-Catholic revolution in Italy forced him into exile from 1847-1850. He referred to himself as the prisoner of the Vatican. His astounding accomplishments include defining the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1854. This dogma was the basis from which Pope Pius XII declared the dogma of the Assumption in 1950. He also published a Syllabus of Errors which condemned secret societies, freemasonry, communism and modernism, which teaches that one religion is as good as another. Finally in 1869 he convoked the First Vatican Council, which in 1870 defined Papal Infallibility. Throughout his long papacy his health suffered greatly. He died on February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1878 at the age of 85 after suffering an epileptic seizure which caused a deadly heart attack. He was declared blessed on September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2000 by Pope St. John Paul II.

## FIRST FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 7<sup>TH</sup>, A DAY OF SPECIAL DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

Once again, all are offered the spiritual opportunity to grow in holiness by attending Mass and receiving Holy Communion on the First Friday of the month. This monthly day is set aside by the Church to publicly practice devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Have you ever taken advantage of this opportunity in our parish? Does there always seem to be something else more important to do on First Friday? Please think again! Reconsider your priorities! Some day in the next life EVERYTHING that seemed so important in this life will have no value at all UNLESS it leads us to God! Mass is offered at 6:30 AM and at 8:00 AM and at 7:00 PM.

The Holy Eucharist is exposed for adoration after the 8:00 AM Mass until 10:00 AM when a simple reposition takes place and the church is closed. The sacrament is then exposed again at 5:00 PM. Benediction takes place at 6:30 PM followed by Mass at 7:00 PM.

## February 2<sup>nd</sup> is also Ground Hog Day!

So many folks who are not Catholic or who are not up on Catholic spirituality and liturgy think that the big event of the second day of February is Groundhog's day and they forget all about, or worse have never even heard of the presentation of the Lord in the temple or the purification of his holy mother Mary. So...here is a bit of background information on the origins of this observance, since the whole nation will be mistakenly focusing its attention on this furry little creature!

The ancient Celtic people divided the year differently than we do now. For them, February 1<sup>st</sup> was the first day of spring. The first day of May, August and November marked the beginnings of the other seasons. That way of dividing the year makes a lot of sense in Northern Europe, where the change in the length of days is dramatic.

February 1<sup>st</sup>, the Feast of St. Brigid in Ireland and February 2<sup>nd</sup>, Candlemas Day are associated with folklore about the arrival of spring, or at least the arrival of lengthening of days.

German farmers say that on Candlemas the badger interrupts its winter nap to check the weather. If the day is sunny, the badger sees its shadow and gets scared, and then goes back to hibernate for six more weeks. The bright, cold days of winter aren't over yet. But...if the day is cloudy, the badger cannot see its shadow. That means hibernation is over and the cloudy, warmer weather of spring is about to arrive. Good news for the farmers! German farmers who immigrated to Pennsylvania did not find badgers. They decided that groundhogs would provide the spring forecast instead. So on Candlemas Day we wonder if the groundhog will see its shadow or if spring is coming soon.

I don't know about you, but my hope is that "Punxsutawney Phil," the name given to the official groundhog used in Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania each year to formally observe this custom, will be met by a cloudy day on Sunday and that a beautiful springtime here in the city of Wyandotte will not be so desperately far away as it seems today!

## A Prayerful Thought on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord

Those who have grown old in wisdom and age and grace must be very dear to the Good Lord. The aged were among the first to whom he revealed his Son. Mary brought him to the elderly Zechariah and Elizabeth and now he who is the light of revelation to the gentiles casts the warmth and radiance of his light into the lives of the elderly Simeon and Anna. Old age is a special time of blessing from the Lord. It is a time of slowing down in order that we might: "Be still! And know that I am God..." Psalm 46:11. Who says "starość nie jest radość?"

# The Future of the Shrinking Catholic Church

New numbers from the **Pew Research Center** continue to outline a bleak future for believers. The rise in the religiously unaffiliated – the “nones” – continues and now has climbed to 26%. To put it into absolute numerical terms, the number of “nones,” has grown by 30 million over the past 10 years, **Pew** reports.

At the same time, the number of American adults who self-identify as Christians is down 12 percentage points in the last decade to 65%. Catholics, in particular, now represent only one-in-five adults, or 20%, of the population, down from 23% in 2009.

So what should we make of all this? *First*, with the decline in belief in God, what will fill the void? In Dostoyevsky’s Russian Novel “The Possessed,” (1872) the character Kirilov makes this statement” “If there is no God, then I am God.” We see this playing out today in society’s greater cultural shifts of the 50 years. Without God, man becomes the arbiter of life, deciding when it has value and when it is to be discarded. Without God, man becomes the arbiter of truth. There is no moral order; there is no sin, we have no need of a savior; there is no heaven. All is permitted, and there is no reason to strive to serve anyone other than ourselves. In short: If there is no God, there is only chaos.

A second point brings us to the often quoted, yet often misunderstood, comments made by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger during a German radio address at Christmas in 1969 in which many say he was advocating for a “smaller, purer Church.”

Here’s what he really said: “From the crisis of today the Church of tomorrow will emerge – a church that has lost much. She will become small and will have to start afresh more or less from the beginning. She will no longer be able to inhabit many of the edifices she built in prosperity. As the number of her adherents diminishes, so will she lose many of her social privileges. In contrast to an earlier age, she will be seen much more as a voluntary society entered only by free decisions...”

Cardinal Ratzinger was prophetic. We have arrived at the age where most no longer have to “opt out” of religious affiliation but instead must “opt in.” the trajectory of the culture has so dramatically shifted away from the goodness, truth and beauty which the Church represents that people of faith are truly “counter cultural.” Catholic baptisms, confirmations and weddings are no longer automatic. They must be sought out. And those doing the seeking must therefore greatly desire a life with and for Christ.

Which is why, Ratzinger continued, “the Church will be a more spiritual church, not presuming upon a political mandate.”

“It will be hardgoing for the Church, for the process of crystallization and clarification will cost her much valuable energy,” he added. “It will make her poor and cause her to become the Church of the meek. The process will be all the more arduous, for sectarian narrow-mindedness as well as pompous self-will will have to be shed.”

But therein lies our hope. For those who choose to be people of faith do so because they are people of faith. And so these believers become, Cardinal Ratzinger said, the “Church of faith.”

This is where the Church is headed. We will not be a smaller Church because that is the “best” Church; we will be a smaller more spiritual Church because a smaller, more dedicated number of people with faith will be the only ones left.

But that does not mean that believers can sit back and wait for the inevitable. Our job is not to mark the steady decline in believers or to click our tongues in disapproval. Rather, we are called to be, as Pope Francis regularly encourages us, a missionary Church – reaching out, inviting, sharing the Good News of the Gospel in small, concrete everyday ways. This could be as simple as inviting someone over for dinner and talking about God. It could be as simple as reading a book about the saints to your children. It could be as simple as posting a quote on social media.

So while the Church’s light in the world may be smaller, it may burn brighter, as those who love Christ with all their hearts more actively seek to bring him to the world.

*Wrinkles mean you laughed, gray hair means you cared, scars mean you lived.*