Feb 2 Tuesday The Presentation of the Lord (Candlemas)
Lectionary #524 (LCM #252) white

Orientation
Following Luke’s computation, forty days after the Nativity of the Lord, we celebrate the Presentation of the Lord. According to Jewish law, a woman was required to make an offering after the birth of a male child. Jesus was presented by Mary and Joseph in the temple of Jerusalem, along with two turtledoves, as recounted in the Gospel of Luke. Jesus is recognized by the prophets Anna and Simeon, and this bittersweet discovery known as the Canticle of Simeon, the Nunc Dimittis, is sung every night during Compline, or Night Prayer.

This feast was celebrated in Jerusalem as early as 386. It soon evolved into a vigil of expectation for the Lord who comes to meet his people with the light of salvation. Throughout the Eastern Church the feast is known as “The Encounter,” the cosmic encounter between God and creation symbolized by the meeting of Jesus with Anna and Simeon in the temple. By the seventh century, the feast had come to Rome, where it seems to have included a candlelight or torchlight procession.

Until 1969 it was known in the West as the feast of the Purification of Our Lady. In association with this name, the Directory of Popular Piety and the Liturgy (120) recommends that mothers be blessed on this day.

Roman Missal
There is a wonderful tradition that is celebrated on this day: the Blessing of Candles and Procession. Plan in advance and invite parishioners to bring candles from home, small votives, seven-day candles, and other candles to be blessed at Mass. Rite I begins “in a chapel or some other suitable place outside church,” weather permitting. It would seem most logical to celebrate this with an evening Mass.

If celebrating Evening Prayer, the candle-blessing and procession can function as the lucernarium, since it is best celebrated after dark. On this day candles to be used on the following day for the Blessing of Throats should be blessed as well. The order of service appears in Roman Missal in the Proper of Saints for February 2, in the Book of Blessings and more fully in the Ceremonial of Bishops.

● Gathering: Begin in a place other than the church, perhaps where the Palm Sunday procession begins or in the parish school. Greeters offer candles to all who gather, unless they have brought their own. If it is not possible to gather in a separate place, use the “solemn entrance” option and fill the worship place with candlelight. The procession should be an action of the whole assembly, not just a few people moving from a table with candles to the altar.

● Candles are lit while the assembly sings the proper antiphon or a hymn.

● Sign of the cross, Greeting, Invitation are offered.

● Blessing is said over the candles and candles are sprinkled with holy water.

● Incense is placed in the censer.

● Invitation to the procession: Deacon or presider announces the procession as in the Roman Missal.
• **Procession moves to the site of the Eucharist.** Note that, as on Palm Sunday and at the Easter Vigil, the assembly follows the presider who follows the censer, the cross borne between two candles, and the Book of Gospels (CB, 246). All carry lit candles and sing the Antiphon and Canticle of Simeon (or a metrical version of the canticle). The processional antiphon, *Lumen ad revelationem,* is easy to sing in Latin or English. It is used with the Canticle of Simeon and accompanies the procession. At least one Catholic hymnal (*Worship #1023*) has an English adaptation that works well.

• **Entrance into the church:** The rite calls for the Entrance Song and then the Gloria. But two different pieces of music followed by a sung Gloria make the rite unwieldy. Perhaps an Opening Hymn or the Gloria might be sung to mark the transition from procession to the Mass. The setting for the Gloria should be the Christmas version (wear the Christmas vestments, too). During the song, the altar is venerated and incensed by the presider. When the singing and movement cease, the Opening Prayer is chanted/recited.

• **Candles may be extinguished** as everyone sits for the Liturgy of the Word, or kept lit until the proclamation of the Gospel. Candles can be lit again, according to ancient tradition, for the Eucharistic Prayer.

The presidential prayers are from the Proper of Saints for February 2. The Presentation of the Lord has a proper Preface (P 49).

**Liturgy of the Hours**
The Psalter is from the Proper of the seasons.

**Devotions and Sacramentals**
A popular Hispanic custom is the “Presentation of the Christ Child.” Families bring to the church the figure of the Infant Jesus from their home *nacimientos,* or manger scenes. The figures are dressed in lace and presented for a blessing at Mass.