

Our Faith: The Blessing of Candles

The popular name for the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple is Candlemas. The association of this feast with candles comes from the song of Simeon when he calls Jesus 'a light to lighten the Gentiles'. It is because of this that it has become traditional to begin Mass with the blessing of candles for use in church during the year. In some churches, an altar is covered in candles which remain unlit and are blessed for future use. During Mass on this feast we often carry lighted candles in procession to remind us of the Lord, the light of the world, coming into His Temple. It is also very appropriate on this feast to have candles blessed for use in the home, particularly candles that might burn before holy images or during family meals. It is a beautiful way to hallow the life of your home and draw your family together. May the light of Christ, which no darkness can eclipse, shine in our homes and lives, this day and always.

Saints and Heroes: Saint Blaise

Blaise was Bishop of Sebaste in Asia Minor and is said to have been martyred about the year 300. Because he was tortured by having his body torn with the iron combs then used by woolcombers, he became the patron saint of this trade. Since the woollen trade flourished in England for hundreds of years, the name of Bishop Blaise often occurs, usually as an inn-sign in towns that have at one time been centres of the woollen trade, such as Cirencester and Exeter. He became associated with guilds of woolcombers in Norwich, Yorkshire and elsewhere, and his day was celebrated by them up to fairly modern times. We are told that until 1825 a Bishop Blaise festival and procession were held annually in Bradford, when a child recited the Bishop's story in verses that began: 'Hail to the day whose kind auspicious rays deigned first to smile on famous Bishop Blaise.' It is also told of him that on his way to prison he cured by a word a boy who had in his throat a fish-bone that could not be pulled out. He is therefore often invoked by people with throat troubles and some churches offer a throat-blessing ceremony on his feast day, 3rd February.

Collect

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, O Lord; and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of thy only Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

*The Collect for Aid Against All Perils,
Book of Common Prayer 1662*

28th January 2024

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany/
Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time



In today's Gospel Reading the Lord enters the Capernaum synagogue, teaching and acting with 'authority'. There is a great deal of meaning in this one word. The word translated as 'authority' is in Greek 'exousia'. 'Ex' means 'out' and 'ousia' means 'nature or essence'. In the Capernaum synagogue, therefore, the Lord speaks and acts 'out of his essence' or 'out of his nature'. And the essence or nature of the Lord Jesus is divinity. In the incarnation God's eternal and divine nature is married to our fallen human nature in order to heal it of its darkness and sickness. Christ is the coming together of divinity and humanity for precisely this purpose, uniting two natures in his one person. This is how God wishes to defeat the twin enemies of Sin and Death, by taking to himself the very thing which Sin and Death had enthralled to themselves. When the Lord Jesus speaks, therefore, it is not a man speaking words of human wisdom out of his fallen and flawed nature, it is the God-man who speaks out of his divine nature. The Lord Jesus speaks and acts in the very Person of God. The demon is cast out by God in the person of the incarnate Saviour. Liberal Christianity wishes to reduce Jesus to a teacher of values or vague spiritual truths, a teller of stories, and an example of liberal attitudes. We stand athwart this hollowed out interpretation. We believe Christ is God incarnate, who, when speaking and acting does so with nothing less than divine power.

Today's Gospel: St. Mark 1: 21-28