

Candlemas

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Preacher: Fr. Paul Beutell

[0 : 00] And behold, there was in Jerusalem a man named Simeon. Verse from this evening's holy gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen. I was a rink rat growing up. The city I grew up in had an indoor ice rink. And I would hang out there as much as I could from the fall and then all the way through the winter and into the spring. I'd keep my hockey skates handy and would look for any opportunity to get on the ice. On Friday and Saturday nights, I'd drag my equipment with me to public skating and play with the adults that rented the ice afterwards.

Sometimes I'd have to walk home dragging my equipment with me. As a kid, I also remember seeing what I affectionately think of as church rats at my local parish.

As I cut through the property on my way to and from other places, I'd see both men and women, some who retired and some not, who seemed to be somewhere on the parish property all the time.

[1 : 09] I'd see them pulling weeds or caring for the priest's vegetable garden, throwing salt on the walkways or just puttering around the grounds.

But then there were other times when I would see them inside the church praying. Back in those days, the church's doors were open so I could go inside to get a drink of water or to warm up as I was cutting back and forth to the various places I was going around town.

And I'd see them kneeling or sitting in a pew, just praying. No one else around. Mass was not about to begin, nor had it recently ended.

It was just them, alone with God. I admired this a lot. In this evening's Gospel Lesson from St. Luke, we are told about two great church rats, Simeon and Anna.

Simeon was a devout man and a prophet. He was at the temple each day praying for Israel's redemption. The Holy Ghost was upon him and had revealed to him that he would not die until he saw their Redeemer, the Christ, face to face.

[2 : 31] Once he saw the infant Jesus' face, his work as a prayer warrior was finished. And he proclaimed he was ready to depart this life in peace. His declaration of praise is recorded in the Nunc Diminis, which Father recited for us tonight and is also recited after the second lesson in evening prayer.

Anna was a prophetess and a widow who lived at the temple. For 84 years, she was inside the temple gates day and night, praying and fasting.

When she saw the infant Jesus, she praised God and told everyone that salvation had come to Israel. We don't have many church rats today.

In part, this is because, for safety purposes, our churches are not open like they used to be. But even if they were, I'm not sure how many would take advantage of it.

We're busy doing what I'm not always sure. So if you take time to putter around the church or, more importantly, just to sit in the sanctuary, kneel in the sanctuary, pray.

[3 : 51] I think the church has really lost something. And yet, as great as it would be for parishioners to be here in the pews, praying silently at various times throughout the week, we don't have to be on the parish property to be church rats.

Unlike Israel, we don't have one exclusive, centralized place for worship. In St. John chapter 4, verses 21 and 23, Jesus told the woman at the well, We live in the hour Jesus speaks of here. While church buildings such as ours, where Orthodox, biblical, sacramental worship takes place, are important, they're not as essential to Christians, to the same level of the temple in Jerusalem, was to the Jews.

If it became necessary, we, like the early church, could worship God fully and properly. That is, in spirit and in truth, with decency and order, and in the beauty of holiness, just about anywhere.

All we need is a proper priest and bread and wine. A table would sure be nice. And we could do this as Jesus commanded.

[5 : 35] How then can you and I be church rats in this 21st century? We can live with the spiritual attitude of Simeon and Anna.

We can commit our lives to prayer. We can set our minds on Christ and his church. We can ask what we can do around our parish to be of help.

Here are some ideas. Every morning we can begin our day with prayer and then pray morning prayer too. Here's a short saying to remind us to start our day with prayer.

It goes, Regularity and fidelity and rising in the morning are of capital importance. It is a question of giving the first moments of the day to our Lord or to his enemy.

And the whole day bears a reflection of this first choice. When we first wake up in the morning, do we click on the news? Or do we take time for prayer? Throughout the day we can weave little prayers into our day or take time in the midst of our day for formal prayer.

[6 : 49] Keeping our minds on the things of God. We can then take time each evening for evening prayer and then pray again before we go off to sleep.

Colossians chapter 3 verses 1 and 2 commends us, This is what it means to pray without ceasing. When given the opportunity to worship corporately, work at our parish or serve our fellow parishioners, we can be the one who is there.

Even small tasks can help so very much. As the saying goes, many hands make like the work.

We may not be able to be physically at the church day and night like Anna or every day like Simeon. But our hearts and our minds can be on it like theirs was.

[8 : 04] We can pray for the whole church. We can pray for the APA. We can pray for our parish. We can pray for our bishops and other clergy.

We can pray for lay readers and missions that do not have priests. And those who serve before, during, and after the mass. We can pray for church musicians and singers.

We can pray for our fellow parishioners and for those who may visit. And pray that more will visit.

We don't have to be physically at the church to be a church rat.

But we do need to have the spirit, the desire, and the mindfulness of one. The benefits of being a church rat are great.

Just look at Simeon and Anna. For all their love, care, attention, and prayers for Israel. They got to see Jesus face to face. Something we all desire one day to do.

[9 : 10] Well worth their effort. Wouldn't you agree? In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Amen. Thank you.