

LUX EDMUNDI: REFLECTION FOR THE FEAST OF THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD IN THE TEMPLE

The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple, Candlemas, falls on Thursday, 2nd February. This is the patronal feast of *Lux Edmundi*, an occasion for each of us to re-new our personal commitment to the service of youth for the sake of the Gospel in the apostolate of the school, after the example, and in the charism, of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice.

This is the feast of Christ as Light for the nations and the glory of Israel. Jesus was presented in the Temple in accordance with the Law. We must never forget that Jesus himself, Mary, his Mother, Joseph, his legal father, the apostles and the earliest disciples, were Jews. Joseph was a “just man”, a man of the Law. “James the Just”, “brother of the Lord”, a son of Joseph by a previous marriage, according to one tradition, and, thus, to human eyes, an agnate sibling, a paternal half-brother, of Jesus, was a “pillar” of the Jerusalem Church, a participant in crucial meetings there with Peter and Paul, and also renowned for his zeal, first for the Old, then for the New Law. In human terms, respect for the Law, for being a Jew, was one of the gifts of Joseph to Jesus. Jesus, therefore, was reared in Nazareth as a Jew of his time and place and, though he challenged the religious authorities of the day in their reading of the Law, his mission was, not to destroy, but to fulfil, the Law.

This is, besides, an occasion when we might reflect, too, on the *raison d’être* of *Lux Edmundi*, viz., the proclamation of Christ Jesus, not alone as the image of the invisible God, but as the image also of humanity at its most authentic. In the words of *Gaudium et Spes*, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, promulgated at the Second Vatican Council on 7th December, 1964 – and, with immediate reference to this specific passage, cited and quoted repeatedly thereafter by Pope St. John Paul II: “In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear. For Adam, the first man, was a type of him who was to come, Christ the Lord, the new Adam, in the very revelation of the mystery of the Father and of his love, fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling. ... He who is the ‘image of the invisible God (Col 1:15)’, is himself the perfect man who has restored in the children of Adam that likeness to God which had been disfigured ever since the first sin. Human nature, by the very fact that it was assumed, not absorbed, in him, has been raised in us also to a dignity beyond compare (para. 22)”.

As, in effect, thus shown to be the pattern and paradigm of humanity at it is meant by God to be, as, indeed, the only means by which humanity can be rightly understood, interpreted and explained, Christ is the source and the summit, the centre and circumference, of Catholic formation, Catholic education, the Catholic school. He is what we are about and, whilst we must, of necessity, protect and promote Catholic doctrine and Catholic practice, ultimately, the sole and exclusive object of our dedication is not a creed or a dogma, not an institution or even a particular religious identity. First, last and always, we are committed to a person, to the person of Christ, in respect of whom each one of us must, in our moment in the region of Caesaria Philippi, answer him directly when he asks – when, indeed, he challenges - “What about *you*? Who do *you* say I am” (Cf. *Matthew* 16: 13-20).

We will, of course, think and pray at Candlemas and after about the Schools Admissions Bill, the Parents’ and Students’ Charter, Junior Certificate reform, strike ballots, and God alone knows what else. However, if we do not take time to get down to Christ, ever and always the real, the only, nitty gritty of what we are and of what we are about, it will be, not this Minister or that, not the media, but we ourselves who will, inevitably, eviscerate our Catholic schools of their very Catholicity.