

Catholic Family Celebrations

Celebrations for February

Feb. 2 “Presentation of the Lord,” “Candlemas,” and even “Groundhog Day”



The Church officially recognizes this day as the Presentation of the Lord. In former days, it was also referred to as the Purification of Mary. This feast recognizes the day that Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple. It was traditional Jewish law that baby boys were presented at the temple 40 days after their birth, thus we have this feast 40 days after Christmas. The parents were to present an offering and the woman was considered purified after giving birth. Since Joseph and Mary were poor, their offering consisted of two doves. And it should also be noted that Mary did not require the purification, but in her humility she followed the law. It is recorded in Scripture that at the presentation, Mary received the prophecy from Simeon that became her first sorrow. (Can we remember the other 6? <http://www.sevensorrows.com/explanation.htm>)

The Presentation or Purification of Mary also was a time when the church would bless candles for people to use in their homes. There were (and still are) beautiful processions with candles associated with the Mass on this day. Thus, the day also became known as **Candlemas**.

I don't think that Groundhog day has anything to do with any church traditions, but it a fun secular holiday to mention with the kids. I just wouldn't give it any precedence over the real, church feast day.

Something to Do:

If you can get to mass today, great. Otherwise, make sure you share the gospel reading at dinnertime. You can discuss Anna's and Simeon's prophecies. Talk about how this must have brought sorrow to Mary—especially when a new baby brings so much hope and joy.

Gospel, Luke 2:22-40²²

And when the day came for them to be purified in keeping with the Law of Moses, they took him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord-

²³ observing what is written in the Law of the Lord: Every first-born male must be consecrated to the Lord-

²⁴ and also to offer in sacrifice, in accordance with what is prescribed in the Law of the Lord, a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

²⁵ Now in Jerusalem there was a man named Simeon. He was an upright and devout man; he looked forward to the restoration of Israel and the Holy Spirit rested on him.

²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had set eyes on the Christ of the Lord.

²⁷ Prompted by the Spirit he came to the Temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the Law required,

²⁸ he took him into his arms and blessed God; and he said:

²⁹ Now, Master, you are letting your servant go in peace as you promised;

³⁰ for my eyes have seen the salvation

³¹ which you have made ready in the sight of the nations;

³² a light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel.

³³ As the child's father and mother were wondering at the things that were being said about him,

³⁴ Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, 'Look, he is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, destined to be a sign that is opposed-

³⁵ and a sword will pierce your soul too -- so that the secret thoughts of many may be laid bare.'

³⁶ There was a prophetess, too, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was well on in years. Her days of girlhood over, she had been married for seven years

³⁷ before becoming a widow. She was now eighty-four years old and never left the Temple, serving God night and day with fasting and prayer.

³⁸ She came up just at that moment and began to praise God; and she spoke of the child to all who looked forward to the deliverance of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When they had done everything the Law of the Lord required, they went back to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth.

⁴⁰ And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him.

Candlemas:

If you're at mass, consider having a candle blessed today that you could use at your home for special occasions—starting tonight at dinner.

Something to Eat:

Although, not too practical, you could serve 2 Cornish hens for dinner which would represent the 2 doves that Joseph and Mary offered for their sacrifice. For my size family, we just use two chickens—not quite representative of doves, but could portray the idea. (I'll look for small ones at the grocery store.) And here is a very, simple slow cooker recipe for the chicken(s). <http://allrecipes.com/recipe/baked-slow-cooker-chicken/detail.aspx> or you could just get a couple of rotisserie chickens. Get 2 and serve on a platter. (There is a lot to do with leftover rotisserie chicken.)

Something to Pray:

Say the “Presentation of Our Lord” decade of the rosary today.

Groundhog Day Craft: Since it is a silly tradition, Groundhog Day deserves a silly craft. Look for the Groundhog day hat activity page at the end.

Feb. 3 Feast of St. Blaise

Story of St. Blaise

By Father William Saunders

from [Arlington Catholic Herald Web Site: <http://www.catholicherald.com/>]



In accord with various traditions, St. Blaise was born to rich and noble parents, and received a Christian education. He was a physician before being consecrated a bishop at a young age. Although such a statement seems terse, keep in mind that at that time the local community usually nominated a man to be a bishop based on his outstanding holiness and leadership qualities; he in turn was then examined and consecrated by other bishops with the approval of the Holy Father. Therefore, St. Blaise must have been a great witness of our Faith, to say the least.

During the persecution of Licinius in 300, St. Blaise, receiving some divine command, moved from the town, and lived as a hermit in a cave. Wild animals visited, and he healed any that were sick and wounded. One day, a group of hunters gathering wild beasts for the game in the amphitheater discovered St. Blaise and seized him. As he was being taken to the governor Agricolaus, the governor of Cappadocia and Lesser Armenia, St. Blaise encountered a woman whose pig was being seized by a wolf; St. Blaise commanded the wolf to release the pig, and it was freed unhurt.

While in prison, he miraculously cured a small boy who was choking to death on a fishbone lodged in his throat. Also, the woman whose pig had been saved brought St. Blaise candles so that his cell would have light and he could read the sacred Scriptures.

Eventually, Agricolaus condemned St. Blaise for upholding his Christian faith rather than apostatizing. He was tortured with the iron comb (an instrument designed for combing wool but was used here for shredding the skin) and finally beheaded.

By the sixth century, St. Blaise's intercession was invoked for diseases of the throat in the East. As early as the eighth century, records attest to the veneration of St. Blaise in Europe, and he became one of the most popular saints in the spiritual life of the Middle Ages. Many altars were dedicated to his honor, and even the Abbey of St. Blaise in southern Germany claimed to have some of his relics.

One reason for St. Blaise's popularity arose from the fact he was a physician who cured, even performing miraculous cures. Thereby, those who were sick, especially with throat ailments, invoked his intercession. Eventually the custom of the blessing of throats arose, whereby the priest held two crossed candles over the heads of the faithful or touched their throats with them while he invoked the prayer of the saint and imparted God's blessing. In our present Roman Ritual, the priest prays, "Through the intercession of St. Blaise, bishop and martyr, may God deliver you from every disease of the throat and from every other illness, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." This practice continues in many parishes on St. Blaise's feast day.

Something to Do:

Go to Mass today and have your family's throats blessed.

Something to Pray:

Prayer to St. Blaise or Blase for protection, particularly from afflictions of the throat.



O glorious St. Blaise, who by your martyrdom left to the Church a precious witness to the Faith, obtain for us the grace to preserve within ourselves this divine gift, and to defend — without concern for human respect — both by word and example, the truth of that same Faith, which is so wickedly attacked and slandered in these our times. You miraculously restored a little child who was at the point of death because of an affliction of the throat.

Grant us your mighty protection in similar misfortunes. And, above all, obtain for us the grace of Christian mortification, together with faithful observance of the precepts of the Church, which keep us from offending almighty God. Amen.

Feb 6 Feast of St. Paul Miki and Companions

I find the story of this saint so inspiring. I also like that it shows how the church has prevailed over persecution in more modern times.

Nagasaki, Japan, is familiar to Americans as the city on which the second atomic bomb was dropped, killing hundreds of thousands. Three and a half centuries before, twenty-six martyrs of Japan were crucified on a hill, now known as the Holy Mountain, overlooking Nagasaki. Among them were priests, brothers and laymen, Franciscans, Jesuits and members of the Secular Franciscan Order; there were catechists, doctors, simple artisans and servants, old men and innocent children—all united in a common faith and love for Jesus and his church.



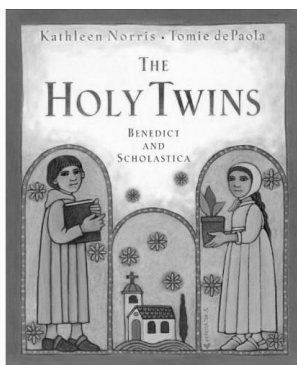
Brother Paul Miki, a Jesuit and a native of Japan, has become the best known among the martyrs of Japan. While hanging upon a cross Paul Miki preached to the people gathered for the execution: "The sentence of judgment says these men came to Japan from the Philippines, but I did not come from any other country. I am a true Japanese. The only reason for my being killed is that I have taught the doctrine of Christ. I certainly did teach the doctrine of Christ. I thank God it is for this reason I die. I believe that I am telling only the truth before I die. I know you believe me and I want to say to you all once again: Ask Christ to help you to become happy. I obey Christ. After Christ's example I forgive my persecutors. I do not hate them. I ask God to have pity on all, and I hope my blood will fall on my fellow men as a fruitful rain."

When missionaries returned to Japan in the 1860s, at first they found no trace of Christianity. But after establishing themselves they found that thousands of Christians lived around Nagasaki and that they had secretly preserved the faith. Beatified in 1627, the martyrs of Japan were finally canonized in 1862.

— Excerpted from *Saint of the Day*, Leonard Foley, O.F.M.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i8AuKTLjkDs> or just search it on Youtube under St. Paul Miki from the Apostleship of Prayer

Friday, February 10, Feast of St. Scholastica



Although we have already had a saint this week, I didn't want to miss St. Scholastica. If I am at the library around this time, I pick up a book there by Tomie dePaola called The Holy Twins. One day, I hope to own my own copy—but I know exactly where this one is located at the community library—almost like its mine!

If you haven't guessed from the book title, Scholastica and Benedict were twins. Under Benedict's direction, Scholastica opened up a convent for nuns near Benedict's monastery.

A famous story about them goes like this. St. Benedict was visiting his sister at her convent. He was sharing with her the joys of heaven. When it became late, Benedict said he had to leave. His sister begged him to stay, but he felt he had to refuse. She bowed her head into his hands in prayer. When she rose again, a storm suddenly arose forcing Benedict to stay and carry on the conversation. Three days after Benedict left, Scholastica died. A dove rose from her signifying her spirit flying to heaven.

Something to Do: Share this short story about her or use one from another book. Make an origami dove.



February 11 Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

This feast marks the first appearance of Our Lady to St. Bernadette in Lourdes, France.

Something to do: Besides the usual Mary feast day activities (Mass, Rosary, etc.), this feast comes with many opportunities for a pilgrimage to a Lady of Lourdes Shrine. There so are many shrines right here in America which are replicas of the Shrine in Lourdes, France where Mary first appeared to St. Bernadette. Making a pilgrimage to one of these shrines is a great family activity. To make it seem more like a pilgrimage, we often say a decade or 2 of the rosary coming and going in the car and say a couple decades when we are there. I've listed as many shrines of Our Lady of Lourdes that I could find on the internet. See if there is one near you. I was surprised to see that I've been to over half a dozen of these over the course of family vacations and pilgrimages.

It is also a great time to watch the classic: *Song of Bernadette* with the family. Or the new DVD just out from Navis Pictures puts on this epic story with a cast of over 150 children. It looks really good, although I've only seen the trailer.

http://www.navispictures.com/category_s/20.htm

There 2 also the newer movies called, *Bernadette* and the cartoon version called, *Bernadette, Princess of Lourdes*. The fact that there are so many movies and books about this story and saint tells us that this is a great story to share with our family.

St. Bernadette's body was found to be incorruptible after 10 years when they went to remove her body. It can still be seen today. Here is a short Youtube of that along with some information about her life.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G5711hI04mw&feature=related>

February 14, St. Valentine's Day

A Story about St. Valentine

The Bible Says: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."(John 15:13)

Around the year 270, the Roman Emperor put St. Valentine in jail. He was a Christian priest. At that time the Roman Emperor was imprisoning Christians for not worshipping the Roman gods. Some traditions say that he was arrested because he was performing Christian marriages, but others say it was for helping Christians escape prison. The Emperor had outlawed marriage because he wanted the young Roman men to become soldiers and not to be bothered with marriage.



When he was on trial they asked Valentine what he thought of the Roman gods Jupiter and Mercury. Valentine said they were false gods and that Jesus was the only true God. So the Romans threw him in prison for insulting the gods.

While in prison, Valentine continued to practice his faith. He witnessed to the guards. One of the guards was a good man who had adopted a blind girl. He asked Valentine if his God could help his daughter. Valentine prayed and the girl was given her sight. The guards and their families, 46 people in all, believed in Jesus and were baptized. When the emperor heard about this he was furious that Valentine was still

making converts even in prison, so he had Valentine beheaded.

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Something to do: In the spirit of St. Valentine, we should spread the love of Christ today. A little romance between Mom and Dad is expected, especially since we know St. Valentine helped couples to get married—marriage and romance is just an extension of Christ's love. And so is every other kind of love

for that matter. We can send our love to friends, neighbors, grandparents, siblings, etc. in Christ's name.

A good way to express that love today is through our love and care (and our prayers as we are making them) put into cookies, treats, and handmade cards.

For the past couple of years, I've used the John 3:16 verse that has "Valentine" written down the middle. We've printed out dozens of this verse and glued them to our paper hearts and doilies and glitter. We've also stapled it a sandwich bag and put a cookie inside. This year I may do something with the story of St. Valentine.

Here is a free download of it. If you want it smaller, print multiple copies per page: http://www.christiancrafts.net/pdf/valentine_large.pdf or <http://ministry-to-children.com/valentine-coloring-page/>

