

Candlemas

Evensong readings:-

1 Samuel ch.3, vv1-20

1 Cor ch.14, vv12-20

Gospel: Matthew ch.13, vv10-17

by
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The feast of Candlemas celebrates the Presentation of the infant Jesus in the Temple. It was the occasion of his first visit to his Father's house, as the Temple was, also the purification of his mother Mary according to Jewish law as set out in Leviticus ch12.

An old priest, Simeon, had prayed steadfastly that he might see the one who was to come, the Messiah. As Mary placed her son into his hands, the Holy Spirit made Simeon realise just who he was holding. It is difficult to express in words just what Simeon must have felt at that moment, but the unknown artist has captured the look of wonder and tenderness in Simeon's eyes as he holds the baby Jesus.

Luke recorded the words of Simeon as best he could, and William Tyndale gave us the English translation, the beautiful prayer that we know as the **Nunc Dimittis**

***LORD, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen thy salvation;
Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles: and to be the glory of thy people Israel.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son: and to the Holy Ghost;
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.***

Candlemas is a watershed in terms of the Church calendar, as we cease to consider the Nativity and all that came from it in the early years of Jesus' life, and turn our thoughts to his future, the temptations, the Lenten discipline, and Easter. From an Alpha to an Omega.

(NB: It is really time now that the Christmas decorations were removed from the house now, yes, even the Crib!)

Even now the readings follow a different path, majoring on the distinction between hearing and understanding. It is truer of religious education, whether by sermon or written prose or poetry, that the ideas are the kernel of knowledge. As we express them in words, we tie them to a particular meaning. As I've often remarked, words are the clothes that ideas wear. Hearing without understanding is a phenomenon I first encountered with algebra at school: in faith there is a lot to be understood, especially in the abstract and spiritual realms. Indeed in life generally today there is a lot of a lack of hearing but not understanding about.

Whenever I read John's sixth chapter I wonder just what the hearers made of it, especially when Jesus turned to metaphor. This was completely contrary to Jewish teaching, and even the Disciples were unhappy about it. For they too, had heard but not understood. But what parable could he have used to express his teaching? Think about it.

The much loved reading about young Samuel's call has the words, and then the understanding as well, of why he was called and what he had to do. Paul echoes the same truth to the Corinthians, and in Grecian culture, it was even more appropriate.

The words of Jesus in the Gospel give more point, as he explains why people fail to understand. They are simply not prepared to hear something at variance with their beliefs. People are comfortable very often with their understanding, and very uncomfortable when that understanding is questioned or even mocked. It's worse than hearing that your favourite team at football/rugby/cricket * has lost again. To a largely pastoral audience, Jesus' choice of parables was good, because he was preaching in terms and values that they could understand. The real barrier he was up against was the interpretation of faith in Jewish law, and the resistance to changing it.



I have included the NIV# translation of the Gospel, because it is clear and may be helpful.

The disciples came to him and asked, "Why do you speak to the people in parables?"

He replied:

"Because the knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you, but not to them. Whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.

This is why I speak to them in parables: "Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand.

In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: "You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.

For this people's heart has become calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them.

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear.

For truly I tell you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.

In your prayers, among the many things we have to thank God for, are the skills that produced vaccines which have brought hope and relief to many. Please remember the Holocaust Memorial day (27th) and all affected in some way by it.

AMEN



*(*delete whichever is inapplicable. # Nearly Infallible Version)*