



My Dear Parishioners,

Praised be Jesus Christ! This Wednesday, the “most famous groundhog in Pennsylvania”, Gus, will get some competition as Punxsutawney Phil comes out of his hole to predict more Winter or an early Spring. Whatever happens on the silly day known as Groundhog Day, February 2nd marks a magnificent feast in the Church: ***The Presentation of the Lord***. This feast celebrated on the 40th Day of Christmas dates back to the 4th century and is referred to by various names: The Feast of the Meeting, Candlemas Day or the Purification of Mary. For on this day, the Holy Family present their first-born Son in the Temple; they offer the prescribed sacrifice and Simeon meets his long-awaited Savior. It is customary to bless candles on this Feast as we celebrate the Light of Christ which confronts and combats darkness. In addition, we make the words of Simeon our own, his beautiful NUNC DIMITTIS, a fitting prayer for this day and the end of each day. I encourage you to pray:

Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord,
 according to thy word in peace;
 Because my eyes have seen thy salvation,
 Which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:
 A light to the revelation of the Gentiles,
 and the glory of thy people Israel

On Friday, some parishioners will be visiting the Shrine of St. John Neumann in Philadelphia. We'll bring our parish intentions with us to the Shrine.

To close out this column, I share the story of another saintly “Father John” whose shrine, the Chapel of the Four Chaplains, is also in Philadelphia and whose anniversary is this week. His story and that of his fellow chaplains is worth knowing. Here it is:

John Patrick Washington was a Catholic priest and a lieutenant in the United States Army. He was one of the Four Chaplains, who gave their lives to save other soldiers during the sinking of the troop transport Dorchester during World War II.

Born one of seven children to Irish immigrants, John was a religious boy from a young age, rapidly becoming an altar boy at his local church in Newark, New Jersey, where he grew up. A talented sportsman and intelligent and hard-working child, he performed well at school and was accepted into Seton Hall Preparatory School, where he completed high school and took courses designed to prepare him for the priesthood. Following his graduation, he moved to Seton Hall Seminary and was ordained a priest in 1935.

He served at several New Jersey parishes over the next six years. Upon hearing of the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, he joined the army as a chaplain and was dispatched to Harvard University, where he took a course preparing him for deployment for Europe. Here, he became acquainted with the others of the Four Chaplains for the first time. In January 1943 he joined them on board the Dorchester which was transporting over 900 soldiers to the United Kingdom via Greenland.

On February 2, 1943, the German submarine U-223 spotted the convoy on the move and closed in on the ships, firing a torpedo which struck the Dorchester shortly after midnight. Hundreds of men packed the decks of the rapidly sinking ship and scrambled for the lifeboats. Several of the lifeboats had been damaged and the four chaplains began to organize frightened soldiers. They distributed life jackets from a locker; when the supply of life jackets ran out, each of the chaplains gave theirs to other soldiers. When the last lifeboats were away, the chaplains prayed with those unable to escape the sinking ship. Twenty-seven minutes after the torpedo struck, the Dorchester disappeared below the waves, with 672 men still aboard. The last anyone saw of the four chaplains, they were standing on the deck, arms linked and praying together.

The four chaplains: a Methodist minister, a Catholic priest, a Reformed Church minister and a reformed rabbi were all awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and the Purple Heart. A chapel in their honor was dedicated by President Harry S. Truman at Grace Baptist Church of Philadelphia and is now located at the Philadelphia Navy Yard.

Let's remember these heroic men this week and all the heroic people who give their lives so generously for others.

Peace,

Fr. Rogers

Blessing of Throats will take place on Thursday of this week, the Feast of St. Blaise, at the 7:30AM Mass.