

I must say that, as a foreigner (even being raised among American expats), there is one aspect of American culture that I find mind-blowing: Groundhog day. The whole thing about relying on a rodent to predict if there'll be more weeks of winter is just fascinating to me.

For whatever reason, the furry creature seems to be remembered much more these days. However, there's a much important feast that happened yesterday (and was transferred to today's mass)... and even if y'all seem to be wearing a lot of purple today, we all know it is not Lent yet.

This important feast is the Presentation of our Lord in the Temple. But don't forget about Mr. Groundhog (won't even try to pronounce the punt-a-pawx-bunny-tunny... name). Not yet! Because there's a reason why people hope that creature will predict the end of winter. Just feel how dreadfully cold it is today!

Truth is that we often take modern conveniences such as electricity and heat for granted. In fact, indoor and outdoor lighting has been hailed as one of the major advances in urban development. It allowed days to be fully enjoyed, especially in long, cold and dark winters. We could work till late, study at night, party more and do all sorts of activities that would be unimaginable centuries ago.

Which is why it is often a disaster when there is a major blackout. One of the most famous ones in Brazil happened in

1999, when a widespread power outage affected millions of people in several states. Police officers had to be quickly deployed to the streets, in order to avoid looting. Thousands of people were stuck in subway wagons. Tunnels had to be closed for security reasons. And a total sense of impotence dominated all of us who watched perplexed half of the country being caught defenseless, in pitch dark.

Only when electricity fails, we get to realize how hard life would be if we didn't have light. And even with all the artificial light available nowadays, many people who live in high latitudes of the planet get depressed with the lack of natural light during the winter.

This is probably why our ancestors were so keen on using light as a metaphor to explain how we can see beyond, and understand more about something. In the English language, we ordinarily use expressions such as “shed some light on”, “bring to light”, “enlighten me”, etc. It is not a surprise, then, to know that the prophet Simeon praised Jesus in the temple, calling him “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to Israel”.

But why was such a young child in the temple, if he had already been circumcised? In fact, on January 1st, we celebrated the Feast of the Holy Name of Jesus, which marks his circumcision. However, according to Jewish tradition, his mother also had to be purified at least 40 days after childbirth, which is why they brought those two birds to be sacrificed.

She could have left her child at home, of course, if it weren't for the fact that, according to the Law, every firstborn had to be consecrated to God. The Holy Family had to fulfill the requirements of Mosaic law, and therefore, the infant Jesus was taken to the Temple, to be presented.

But what makes this event different from any other presentation of a young boy in the Temple is that this child was the Messiah, the Son of God. He was light.

Until the liturgical reforms, today would be considered the end of the Christmas season. And there is a reason why, despite being moved to Ordinary Time, this feast comes not long after Christmas and Epiphany. In all those events, we see strangers coming to the Holy Family and worshipping the Christ Child. With the shepherds, we learn he is Christ – the Messiah. With the magi, we learn he is King. And with the prophets in the Temple, we learn he is an all-inclusive light that embraces all of humankind with self-giving love.

Simeon had received a prophecy. He had been guided by the Holy Spirit to visit the Temple that day. He had been told that he would not die before he had seen the Messiah. God's Spirit was with him and showed to him the one who would bring salvation to all. It wasn't "cheap salvation". It wasn't the redemption of a nation only. No. It was light, which is scattered throughout the nations, reaching far away and enfolding the whole world.

Jesus is destined for the death and resurrection, “the falling and the rising”, of many. The prophet knows his path will not be an easy one. He would meet opposition, and cause many to think deeply about him. His own mother was warned she would be pierced by pain like a sword. But Simeon knows that, at the end, the power of love would win. Light wouldn't be covered by darkness. In the economy of salvation, there's no blackout. In the economy of salvation, winter won't last forever. There will be light.

Light allows us to see things more clearly. Light allows us to work long hours. Light provides us security and comfort. Light helps winter be more tolerable. The light of Christ, however, is no ordinary light. It provides this, and much more.

Through Christ, we are able to see the true nature of God. In Christ, we find eternal hope. His light is a transformational light, for it shines upon our hearts and empowers us to become better human beings, according to God's plan. He is a never-ending light, that shines from East to West and from North to South. This light “fills the room” and reaches all of humankind with God's redeeming love. If we choose not to hide from this light and walk in it, Jesus will be reflected through us and we can be light for others.

So we join the prophet Anna, who stood with Simeon – men and women, equal before God – to praise the Holy One for having come to the world as a little child. We sing with joy

and worship our Redeemer. We praise him in this temple, like the ones who praised him in that Temple. And, like the prophets, we go out into the world to speak about this child to all who are looking for redemption. In our hearts, despite difficulties and struggles, there is light. Winter won't last forever. The times of darkness are over, for Christ our Lord is with us now and forever. Amen.