

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

Tuesday, 2nd February, 2016, is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord in the Temple. This is the patronal feast of *Lux Edmundi*. It is Candlemas, a celebration of Christ, the Light of the Nations, and, as Catholic educators, we are called to bring the Light of Christ to the ever-to-be-evangelised New-Found-Land of youth. Like Simeon and Anna, we pray that the Holy Spirit will help us see in each child in our care the lineaments of the face of Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One of God.

This Feast shows Joseph and Mary redeeming Jesus, buying him back from God, to whom, under the Law, he belonged as their first-born. This intimation of Jesus belonging to God makes the Feast eminently suitable as the Day of Consecrated Life – in 2016, indeed, the end of the Year of Consecrated Life - the Day on which we celebrate the religious vocation in general, and, for us, the vocation, in particular, of the thousands of men and women, the sons of Blessed Edmund Ignatius Rice amongst them, who vow themselves to the formation of Christ in the young.

For centuries, these religious constituted the paradigm, as it were, of the Catholic teacher. They and, especially, the Founders of their respective institutes, were the template, the pattern, the exemplar, of the person, female or male, who instructed the young, the poor especially, “in the principles of religion Christian piety”. They established and conducted schools – often free schools – in which the young were prepared for life in both this world and the next. These religious – and clerics - have left us a high and a holy inheritance, which we must cherish and, in our turn, pass on.

There has, though, been, as it were, a Paradigm Shift in the identity and in the reality of the Catholic teacher. We who now work in and with Catholic schools are caught up in this rapid, profound and hugely consequential change. The Catholic teacher in Ireland today is lay and the greater number are lay-women. There are very few religious active in our schools and fewer still active as principals. Besides, more and more, patrons are appointing members of the laity to govern trusts, to chair boards of management, to preserve the specifically Catholic ethos of the schools.

This, for some, is an occasion of consternation, for others, one of celebration. Amongst the latter, it is deemed right and proper that, at long last, the State is beginning, at least, to nudge the Catholic Church out of our schools and what is considered its increasing absence is only to be welcomed.

What we are witnessing, however, is not an absence, but a new mode of presence - of Christ and of his Church, of Nano Nagle, Edmund Rice, Catherine McAuley, Mary Aikenhead, and more besides, ever at the service of youth for the sake of the Gospel in the apostolate of the Catholic school. By the grace of God, this new presence is being effected in, and through, us. We are both agents and objects of this Paradigm Shift. We may not share the consecration as vowed religious of those who have entrusted to us their respective charisms, but we most certainly share with them the most fundamental consecration of all, that of the Sacrament of Baptism, by means of which we are christened, “Christed”, incorporated in the Body of Christ, the Church, the People of God, called to be holy and commissioned to make disciples of all nations. We, too, are given a share in the Three-fold Office of Christ as Priest, Prophet and King, so that, each of us “another Christ”, through him, with him, in him, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and to the glory of the Father, we may, according to our state and respective circumstances, govern, teach and sanctify those committed by Providence to our professional care. In these times of change, the “one thing necessary” for Catholic education in Ireland is that lay-people be educated, trained and formed to discharge these offices effectively.