

THIRTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
SUNDAY OF THE CANAANITE



Icon of Saint Theodore the Tyro -- February 8th

CANDLEWAX AND HEDGEHOGS – GROUNDHOG DAY

Adapted from an article by Fr. Stephen Freeman

Candlewax and Hedgehogs—a peculiar way to entitle an article, I'll admit. But both have their associations with the second day of February. The first is more important so we'll begin there. The second day of February is one of the 12 great feasts, and is also celebrated by Christians in the West. The feast is the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, described in the second chapter of St. Luke's gospel.

There we are told that the Christ child was brought by his mother into the temple in fulfillment of the law, 40 days after his birth (February 2 is 40 days after December 25). The Old Testament Law commanded that "every male that opens the womb (the first born child) shall be holy to the Lord." Thus the child was brought to the Temple in Jerusalem and an offering made on His behalf in thanksgiving to God for his birth.

The Most Holy Mother of God certainly kept this teaching of the Law. We are told that she brought her child to the Temple to make offering (and to receive her purification—another required rite of the Temple). There she was met by two people, one a woman, another a man, and both of them prophets. The woman, Anna the Prophetess, spoke to her concerning her child. The aged prophet Symeon, saw the mother and Child and exclaimed in words we repeat at every Vespers:

Now, O Master, You have kept Your promise, let Your servant go in peace. With mine own eyes I have seen the salvation which You have prepared in the sight of every people: a Light to reveal You to the gentiles and the glory of Your people Israel!

This prophecy of St. Symeon has as its key phrase the description that Christ would be a "light

to enlighten the gentiles." It is the emphasis on light that brings these words each evening to the service of Vespers, when we give thanks to God for the Light He has given us. It is also for this reason that candles are blessed on this holy day. The candles of the Church (and especially those to be taken home and used by the faithful) are blessed on this day, because they remind us that Christ is the "light of the world."

The associations of this feast with light is also where the hedgehogs come in. Christian cultures have usually never let the feasts of the Church stay within the Church itself, but have exported them to the house and farm. So it was that in Europe (particularly Germany) there arose a folk custom that on the Feast of the Presentation (also called "Candlemas" because candles were blessed on that day) that if a hedgehog [badgers in some areas] should come out of his burrow and see the light (and thus his shadow) he would return to his burrow because winter would last six



more weeks.

German immigrants brought this folk custom to America in the 1800's. There being no hedgehogs in North America, the groundhog was drafted to take its place. Thus the secular calendar in America celebrates "Groundhog Day." But only the faithful Christian knows and understands the secret of the Light that shines on February 2nd. Not the light of the sun, frightening a furry creature back into his hole, but the Light of Christ, which frightens all the evil powers that would do us harm.

For an interesting theological meditation on Groundhog Day, I suggest you rent and view the movie by that title. Bill Murray finds redemption as he lives his way through a near eternity of Groundhog Days. But I will spare you.



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The Holy Great Martyr Theodore the Tyro

Saint Theodore, the fourth century martyr, is one of the most famous soldier-saints of the East. He was from Amasia of Pontus. When he entered the army, the persecution of Christians began under the Emperor Maximian (286-305). Theodore was called "tyro," from the Latin *tiro* meaning "recruit" because he was newly enlisted.

When it was reported that he was a Christian, he boldly confessed Christ. The ruler, hoping that he would repent, gave him time to consider the matter more completely and then give answer. Theodore gave answer by setting fire to the temple of Cybele, the "mother of the gods."

Legend has it that he was thrown into prison and left to die of starvation. While in prison, the Lord appeared to Theodore and encouraged him saying:

"Fear not, I am with you. Do not partake of earthly food and drink anymore, for you will be with Me in the other world in the heavens – eternal and everlasting."

There then appeared a multitude of angels in the prison. The guards seeing the angels became terrified. Saint Theodore was taken out, tortured and condemned to death. He suffered a martyr's death by fire.