**Homily of Bishop Martin Hayes of Kilmore for the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord and World Day for Consecrated Life – 2nd February 2025.**

On this Feast of the Presentation of the Lord we hear in our Gospel how the child Jesus was presented to the Lord, his Father, in the Temple. He was handed over to God by Mary and Joseph and we hear how he was to become ***the light to all nations***. In the opening line of our 1st Rd from the prophet Malachi, we hear again how Jesus’ coming among us was promised “***I am going to send my messenger to prepare a way before me…”***.

In our 1st Rd, there is mention of ***refining*** and ***purifying***; a chemical process of removing impurities from base metals using extreme heat and ***alkali*** to neutralise acidity or harshness.

Mary and Joseph, as was the Jewish tradition, brought Jesus to be consecrated. Today, we are celebrating how Jesus came among us to refine and purify us by entering our reality, our humanity. “***Let him enter***”, we have prayed in our Resp. Ps. Jesus came to remove our sinfulness and so he is ***the light of the world*** as he offers hope in the sometime darkness or greyness of our reality. We celebrate Jesus as our light with candles at Candlemas. His light dispels the darkness of sin and ignorance, offering hope and salvation to all who believe in Him.

In our Gospel we hear that Jesus was “***to be consecrated to the Lord***, (his Father)”, to go beyond just representing God, to leave everything for God, to be set apart for God. Today, on this World Day of Consecrated Life, we celebrate all those religious Sisters and Brothers, who have set themselves apart for God, who have left everything in taking vows to live simply lives of celibacy and obedience to follow Jesus. We give thanks for their commitment, and we pray for them in their efforts to follow their religious vocation. Today, we remember the Religious Sisters who are active in our Diocese of Kilmore, Sisters of St Clare, Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary and the Mercy Sisters. Just the weekend before last in the Cathedral, we had the photographic exhibition of 100 years of Irish women missionaries entitled *Daring to Hope: Irish Religious Sisters Embracing the Unknown*.

Those who have consecrated their lives to God, the religious Brothers and Sisters, have been inspired by people like Simeon in our Gospel. ***The Holy Spirit rested on him***; he was ***prompted by the Holy Spirit*** to recognise Jesus as the ***light of the world***. Indeed, Simeon reminded Mary that Jesus would be rejected and that ‘***a sword would pierce her own soul too’***. Like Anna, the widow who prayed continuously in the Temple, our Religious Sisters and Brothers, provide us with an example of Christian living. Both Simeon and Anna were persistent in prayer, and they knew they had a calling to reveal Jesus as our Saviour. These two figures serve as powerful examples of wisdom and patience to us in our journey of faith.

In imitation of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who cared for Jesus and who was there at his suffering and death, like Simeon and Anna, our Religious Brothers and Sisters, offer us a pattern of discipleship. They are leading the way for us, in going through life and by facing all its challenges. They are being purified and refined, in the ***fire*** of the love of Jesus, the ***alkali*** of his grace and so we celebrate the faithfulness of all those who have ***consecrated*** their lives to God, their leadership in faith.

Our Religious Sisters and Brothers in the spirit of our 2nd Rd from Hebrews provide us with the way to follow Jesus***, “who took to himself descent from Abraham***”, and who became completely like his brothers and sisters. Jesus has ‘***been through temptation’*** so that he could be ‘***compassionate and trustworthy’,*** that is, understanding of our humanity and approachable for all our us. In being the Son of God, he was purified and refined so that we could likewise be held sacred and presented to the Lord. Just recently, I lost a good friend, Fr Sean Carroll RIP who died suddenly in London. I have come to realise how his faithfulness to his priestly ministry, his friendship refined him, and I am consoled that he is now being presented to the Lord.

In life we are called to be the best version of ourselves. In celebrating the World Day for Consecrated Life, we hold before us examples of Simeon, Anna, Mary, the Religious Sisters and Brothers, of faithful friends to inspire us to follow Jesus as the ***light of the world.*** In presenting ourselves to God, we like Jesus are surrendering our will and desires to Him. Each one of us has our destiny, our calling in life and we are called to total commitment.