

I am the master of displacement activity. Sooner or later though - it's usually later! - I have to sit down and write something for you to read. I'd rather be out on my x-country skis but I know this duty is unavoidable. With resignation I look at the same old things for February's letter.

Then I notice the obvious: I've never written here about what kick-starts this month, which is Candlemas, the Feast of the Presentation of The Christ [Jesus] in the Temple.

Jesus' mum and dad were required, as a duty of good Jewish parents, to make a token offering for the birth and life of their first-born by going to the temple in Jerusalem within a certain time limit. (It's an echo of the offering Abraham makes after having his son, Isaac, spared from sacrifice.) In doing that, the old duty priest, Simeon, performing the ceremony, has his own epiphany of God's promises being fulfilled, as does the prophetess, Anna. Mary has her post-natal purification completed, and she and Joseph are reassured in their calling to be parents to this child. Simply recognising Jesus for who he is seems to enable all these people to take their part in God's ultimate plan, just by doing their duty.

The reluctance to do a duty indicates our selfish tendencies. The overcoming of any reluctance and carrying out that duty anyway, demonstrates that we can be effective in making the world what God intends it to be. That is, a place where you and I can be the people he wants us to be.

What duty do I - or you - have this year, then? Our common duty, as I see it, is to take part in God's plan, which is to reconcile his creation to himself. That means we need to reconcile ourselves also to him. That starts with reconciling ourselves with one another. And this is how it's done: we overcome seven deadly little sins - pettiness, meanness, spite, pretentiousness, gossip, prejudice and indifference.

This is only a small letter, so I'm only asking of us to achieve small things. Everything else will follow.

And then we can go and play in the snow.