

**Homily for February 2, 2003
Presentation of the Lord
32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
By Father Charles Bowes**

**Malachi 3:1-4
Hebrews 2:14-18
Luke 2:22-40**

God refines us like silver as we do for one another.

“He will sit refining and purifying silver,” says the prophet Malachi in chapter three of our first reading. Many years ago I was visiting a jeweler and a clockmaker who happened to be refining some precious metals, and this passage came to mind as he was working: “He will sit refining and purifying silver.”

As I watched this craftsman, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up in a crucible. He explained that, in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were hottest in order to burn away all the impurities. I asked the silversmith if it was truly necessary for him to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. He answered that he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he had to keep his eyes on the silver the entire time it was in the fire – he dared not even so much as blink. If the silver was left a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed. I asked him, “How do you know when the silver is fully refined?” He smiled and answered, “Oh, that’s easy – when I see my image in it.”

Isn’t that what we do – you and I – isn’t that what God does with each of us? In raising children or in acting as leaders in a Scout program, don’t we seek to pass on the values we hold, getting to see our very image in the young people under our care? Isn’t that how we treat our work – that we somehow see our image within it – clarifying and purifying our efforts so that it is truly the best it can be? All those values articulated in the Scout Oath – about a Scout being brave and trustworthy and loyal – those are the things we all seek to be, and it takes a lifetime and more...it takes God’s good work to make it all happen.

When we leave childhood, we often figure discipline and purification to be things of the past. We are our own self-determining adults. But God never ceases refining us, bringing to light God’s own image in each of us. How incumbent it is upon each of us who have care of children to refine and clarify our images into that of God and God’s own Son? How important is it that our young Scouts enter as wholly as they can into the effort, the process of clarification and purification so that they in turn may share the image of the risen Lord with those entrusted to their care in years to come?

God holds each of us in the refining fire of life with its ups and downs. We follow the way of Jesus – a

way that leads not to death but through death into life, fully in the image of the living God. Each time we participate in the Eucharistic liturgy we remember our baptism, and often it is a commitment to a bath of pain, be that physical, emotional, relational or spiritual. As the bread and wine are presented, it is our lives we place upon the altar to be transformed, refined, purified. We are in communion with the passion, death, Resurrection of Jesus. This is the mystery of our faith – that Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.

If memory serves, it was Pope John XXIII who offered this sage advice to a group of parents: “See all, correct some, forgive everything.”

God refines us like silver as
we do for one another.