

## Solemn Profession of Dom David Yates

2<sup>nd</sup> February 2016

*Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother,  
"A sword will pierce your own soul too."*

My dear Br David, it is a great joy for us to be celebrating your Solemn Profession today, Candlemas Day. The feast of the Presentation of Our Lord and the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary is, of course, the last of the Christmas feasts, the 40<sup>th</sup> day of Christmas. In Catholic Europe today is the day for taking down Christmas decorations and dismantling the crib. It is the link day between Christmas and Easter, the link being the blessing of candles, not only those to be used throughout the year on our altars for the Sacrifice of the Mass, but also the Paschal Candle, which will represent the Risen Christ throughout the 40 days of Easter and the baptismal candles of those to be received into the Church at the Easter Vigil. Unfortunately, in the modern world we have practically lost our understanding of the connectedness of the Liturgical Year, especially in a country like England that all but lost all its ancient Christian traditions at the time of the Reformation. Added to which, most candles are now made of kerosene and not bees' wax, so even the exquisite aroma of earlier times has disappeared.



Br David, you are about to make your Solemn Profession and pronounce your intention and desire to live as a monk of Belmont, vowing to live a life founded on stability, obedience and *conversatio morum*. These vows that we Benedictines profess are like the candles blessed this morning: they are the link between Christmas and Easter, the Incarnation and the Resurrection, the Christ Child presented in the Temple, the sign of contradiction, and the sword that pierces the heart of Mary. In other words, the monastic life is much more than the following of Christ, or even the imitation of Christ. It is communion with Christ, becoming one with Him in the mystery of your own life and vocation. Today you come to be presented in the Temple, offering yourself in Christ as a living sacrifice to God the Father through the inspiration and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. For your own mother this is a very special day, a day of purification, as she offers her son to God, while for us, your brother monks, it is a day of particular rejoicing as, like Simeon and Anna, we welcome you into the bosom of our community.

In his lovely chapter on the observance of Lent, St Benedict tells us that a monk's life should be a continuous Lent, "devoted to prayer with tears, to reading, to compunction of heart and self-denial." At the same time, he is well aware that, for most of us, this is too much to ask for all the year round, so that during the holy season, at least, we should try to "wash away the negligences of other times." Above all, in Lent we "should look forward to holy Easter with joy and spiritual longing." I suspect that this chapter of the Holy Rule is very close to your heart and, of course, it should be, because the sword that pierces the heart of a monk is the same sword that pierces the heart of Mary, the sword of Death and Burial that leads to the dawn of Easter and the light of the Resurrection, the sword of purification that brings hope of new life.

Like the Paschal Candle and all the candles that have been blessed throughout the world today, your dying to self in the furnace of monastic life, that total self-emptying through obedience, *conversatio morum* and stability, will lead you to be, in Christ, the light of the world, the light that shines in the darkness, the light that darkness cannot overcome. In this victory of light over darkness and of life over death, you will usher in the Kingdom of God through silence, humility and good zeal, sharing in the life of God, who is "dux vitae mortuus regnat vivus," the Lord of life who having died reigns and lives. It is only in dying that a candle gives light.

Dear Br David, I assure you of the prayers and affection of the Belmont Community, not only today but always. In the years ahead, you will grow in faith, hope and charity, just like Mary and Joseph, Simeon and Anna. Keep this day and this wonderful feast ever before your eyes. We commend you to the intercession of St Benedict and all the saints, especially your own patron, St David of Scotland. At times the going will get hard and you might weary of the journey, but always remember the beauty of the vocation to which to have been called and that it is God who, in his infinite mercy, has called you to be a monk. Like Mary, a sword has now pierced your heart, a sword that will cause pain, a sword that will bring joy, and the sword is Christ himself. Amen.

