

Brothers and sisters, what a great joy it is to come together as one Church family tonight! Please give an applause to each other as a sign of welcome and joy!

Its a special honor to welcome Bishop-elect, Msgr. Mike Boulette with us tonight! Welcome to our brother, Michael!

To all our pastors, priests, deacons, and men and women in consecrated life, welcome!

But most of all, welcome to all of you, the faithful, the members of the living Body of Christ! You are light to the nations!!! You are a light to us!!! You are a light to your brothers and sisters!!! You are the source of our joy in coming together tonight!

The very words we use to describe tonight's awards, *Lumen Gentium*, literally mean "a Light to the Nations, or, a Light to the Peoples!" These are the first words found in the very important document from the Second Vatican Council known to us as the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

In this beautiful document, one which Bishop Robert Barron has called a theological masterpiece of the twentieth century, we are reminded by the Church that it is you, the People of God, who form the strength and bulwark of the faith! It is here that we learn about the universal call to holiness as a result of our baptism! It is here that we are reminded that not only our words, but most especially our deeds, as missionary disciples of Jesus

Christ, are the means by which the light of God's love is made known in the world!

Light. The world needs light! There is too much darkness in our world! Too many places where unkindness, injustice, lack of charity, and a lack of a basic sense of human decency prevail. So many people in our world walk in this darkness, stumbling about in life looking for the right direction. They are thirsty! They are hungry! They want to see and to know the truth! And only Jesus can supply this truth! Only Jesus can show the way! And Jesus is present in this world through His living Body, the Church! When we work together in Christ, we are helping to shed this much needed light in our world.

Tonight we celebrate this light! Each of you has been presented by your pastor, in consultation with other parish leaders, as someone who shows the meaning of the Light of Christ in your parish community. Every year I have people tell me that they think they don't deserve it, or that they don't do their work in the parish in order to be thanked or recognized — and I know this. I know that you do what you do out of a heart of love and service for others. I know that you do what you do because you love God and neighbor. I know that you do what you do simply because its the right thing to do! But I also know that your love and your service is an example of what it means to follow Christ with all your heart, all your soul, and all your love! And this is my one chance to say "thank you!" Thank you, thank you, thank you!

We celebrate this award on the Feast of the Presentation of Our Lord. This is the day when Christ was presented, by his mom and dad, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph (his foster father), in the Temple. Sacrifices were offered for the newly born children at the Temple as they were dedicated to God's service. On this day an old man named Simeon saw the Christ child and gave thanks to God for being able to come to this day in his life when he would see the Christ, who would be the Light to the World. On this day an elderly woman named Anna also beheld the Christ child and offered her thanks to God for the salvation of Jerusalem.

This day is important not just because Jesus was presented, but because he was presented at the Temple. The Temple in Jerusalem was the place of the Holy of Holies, where the Spirit of God was said to dwell. The Temple was the place of sacrifice, of priestly service. And so, as we contemplate the Feast of the Presentation, our ears should be ringing with these themes of the holy presence of God and of all the sacrifices offered to His Holy Name.

When you were baptized, you were anointed into the three ministries of Christ as priest, prophet, and king! The Second Vatican Council, writing the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church called *Lumen Gentium*, wanted to bring special attention to this aspect of our baptismal grace. I would like, for a moment, to focus specifically on the priestly aspect of your baptism. I know that we tend to identify priestly activity only with our ordained priests! And, of course, theirs' is a special call to the sacramental, ministerial priesthood of Christ. But, each Christian also shares in the general priesthood of Christ! That is, each one of us is called to offer our lives as a

living sacrifice to God the Father, along with Christ, for the salvation of the world!

To use an over-used word right now — this is huge! Christ, our high priest, spoken of in tonight's scriptural reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, has invited us to join our lives with Him for the salvation of all the world! This is a powerful and very high calling! It means that God knows, sees, and accepts our daily sacrifices for the good of all the world. It means that each time you teach a child, feed the hungry, clean the Church, walk with someone converting through the RCIA, pray your rosary, or whatever it is that you do — you are doing it in union with Christ's own sacrifice to the Father!

You may not think of yourself as holy, but you are holy! You may not think of yourself as particularly good, but you are good! You may not think of what you do as priestly sacrifice, but you are sacrificing! You are living the mission! You are bringing light to the world!

So, tonight is a small way of saying thank you. Tonight is a small way of recognizing the good that you do. Tonight is a small way to glorify God for all the wonder and joy in sacrificing that He gives us. And tonight is just a little way of saying, "keep on going!" "Keep honoring God with your life!" "Be a light in this dark world!" Amen. Amen.