

In the 1993 American comedy film, *Groundhog Day*, actor Bill Murray plays an arrogant and ego-centric television meteorologist from Pittsburgh named Phil Conners. Phil is sent to Punxsutawney, PA for the annual Groundhog Day festivities. Because of his high opinion of himself, and his low opinion of Punxsutawney, Phil grudgingly does a hasty report on the event, and attempts to rush out of town with his news-team. A snowstorm forces them back to Punxsutawney for the night, where we find Phil waking up to begin the previous day once more.

Nobody else, besides Phil, notices that everything is the same. Initially confused, he re-lives February 2 over and over, and over again. Waking up each morning to the same song playing on the clock radio, and having to live through his most hated assignment - only to have to repeat the whole day again and again.

Realizing that he is stuck in some sort of a time-loop, he decides to take advantage of the situation realizing that if he's stuck repeating the same day over and over, there aren't any long-term consequences: he learns secrets about other people, has liaisons with different women, steals money, drives recklessly, and gets thrown in jail. But every time he wakes up in what should be the next morning ... right back on February 2 - Groundhog Day.

He becomes despondent and tries more and more bizarre and radical methods to break out of this time-loop. Eventually he befriends the woman of his dreams, and learning from her positive take on things, he uses his apparent infinite amount of time to improve himself, learning to speak French and play the piano. He does good by befriendng everyone he meets, saving lives, and helping the townspeople.

The movie *Groundhog Day* was added to the United States National Film Registry in 2006, for being "culturally, historically, [and] aesthetically significant".

Today is the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. It, too, occurs every year on February 2nd; yet because February 2nd only falls on a Sunday once every seven or so years, it gets a lot less exposure in our consciousness than does Groundhog Day.

The Feast of the Presentation occurs 40 days after the celebration Christmas, and represents the traditional end of the Christmas and

Epiphany seasons. Another tradition of this feast is the blessing of candles.

The Church gives us cycles of feasts and seasons, and repetitions of the numbers 4 and 40. Advent is 4 weeks, Lent is 40 days before Easter. We just learned that today's feast is 40 days after Christmas. 40 days *after* Easter is Ascension Thursday. This is not just a vain repetition of the number 40. Prophets and mystics have fasted and prayed for 40 days. Our Lord spent 40 days in the desert after His Baptism. Israel spent 40 years in the Sinai before they could enter the Promised Land. The Chosen people waited 4,000 years for the promised Messiah.

The number 40 is significant for a more visceral reason. 40 weeks (not 40 days) ... but 40 weeks is 9 months - the length of time it takes to "make a baby." And these 40 day excursions through time are opportunities for our own spiritual re-birth and development.

These repetitions of feasts and seasons, days and celebrations are opportunities for us to become refined ... to be purified "*like gold or like silver [so] that [we] may offer*" our lives and ourselves to God as spiritual sacrifices pleasing to the Lord.

And so, today we close out the time of 40 days since Christmas. It may benefit us to take stock of our own spiritual progress. Do we feel trapped in a time-loop? Are we doing the same things over and over again without any changes? Jesus offers us His help as our "*merciful and faithful high priest*" to help us break out of whatever difficulties we might feel stuck in.

As we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ, let us recognize our own needs for the manifold Grace of God in our lives. Let us pray for the openness to receive that Grace so that we might not only make spiritual progress day-by-day, but so that we might be spiritually transformed by the presence of Jesus Christ in our midst. He who is:

*[the] light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and [the] glory [of] [God's] people Israel.*