
A Walk in the Winter Woods

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
by Dean Sam Candler**

The recent snow and truly cold weather forced many of us indoors for a while. And, for a while, the indoors were wonderful. Maybe there was a fire going somewhere, and maybe we just sat around the warm kitchen and played games. Or read in the den. If one is in a warm indoors, winter can be quite cozy.

But, after a while, I am one of those who has to walk. So, I finally got a chance to walk in the winter woods last week. I get more energy from walking than I do from a cozy fire. Somehow, a walk in the winter woods shows me things, old things that I haven't seen before, and even new things.

Of course, one of the primary features of the winter woods is the emptiness, the lack of green leaves. But that lack of foliage reveals curious and alluring possibilities, too. First of all, the emptiness reveals amazing shades of brown and gray—yes, colors that we often think rather bland, but which can also be beautiful and rich. Secondly, with no leaves or buds yet, the hardwood trees and limbs look like glorious webs of neurons gliding through the air. They somehow look like roots and tendrils above ground. I can see so much in the winter woods, and at greater distances. I see over the next dip in the valley and up to the next hill. I see the deer and foxes. I can rarely see that far in the summertime.

Of course, what I also see is myself, in just the same ways. As my walk becomes more wonderfully contemplative, I see myself in a more direct and bare way, too. I become aware of my own wounds and emptiness. I notice that even the old brown spots and gray streaks have some wisdom in them. I become aware of my own past and my own future. I see things better: my self, my relationships, the world. It is as if my walk is itself a light in the darkness.

Ah! I get it now! This week brings the Feast of Candlemas, February 2, when the Church lights candles. In fact, the Church celebrates a Walk, too—a Candlemas Procession through the church. Yes, we also remember the Presentation of Christ on this day; but the real energy—I believe—is about walking around and lighting candles in the middle of the winter. February 2 lies just about midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. Thus, February 2 is just about the middle of winter, when we are deepest into the dark nights, cold days, and empty woods.

The middle of the winter is the time to wonder about things, maybe even to see our skeletons and nerves and relationships in more direct and bare ways. The middle of the winter is a time for wonder. Our popular culture offers us two other ways to keep this time: Groundhog Day (February 2), and Super Bowl Sunday (usually around this time of year, too!). Those events are fun. But, deep down, they don't do it; those observances do not see for us.

The real energy of this time of year, the middle of the winter, is to be able to see things more clearly. The real energy occurs when we walk through the empty winter woods and see the world more clearly. The real energy occurs when we light a candle for ourselves, and maybe see our souls a little more clearly.



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