

HOMILY

The Solemnity of the Nativity of John the Baptist June 24, 2007

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Today the Church takes a week off from Sundays in Ordinary Time and welcomes us to a birthday party. We are invited to share the gladness that blessed the lives of Zechariah and Elizabeth when their one and only son John was born. In fact, when all who heard the circumstances of his birth, many took them to heart and wondered, “What will this child be?”, for surely the hand of the Lord was with him. Later on, when Jesus’ Disciples asked Jesus about John, Jesus said, “*There has never been a man born greater into the human family than John.*”

As he grew in age and wisdom, John came to realize that he was wonderfully made and called to fulfill a purpose. He was called to be a prophet of the coming dawn welcoming God’s son. He was called to be the voice at Jordan’s flowing stream cleansing people from their sin, making a way for God within.

John was one whose whole life and energies were spent in directing people to Jesus. John was a man sent by God who straddled the Old and New Testaments. In one way, John drew together, in his person and in his preaching, all of the hopes and expectations of the former covenant. But when people flocked to him, enticed by his eccentricities, they found themselves so shaken by the bluntness of his message and the boldness of his delivery that they were eager to do whatever he told them. He deflected their attention from himself to another. “See Jesus!”

- ❖ John was the *herald*, but Jesus is the *message*.
- ❖ John was the *voice*, but Jesus is the *word*.
- ❖ John offered *testimony*, but Jesus is the *truth*.
- ❖ John spoke *of promise*, but Jesus is the *fulfillment of the promise*.
- ❖ John preached *repentance*, but Jesus brought *forgiveness*.
- ❖ John *prepared the path*, but Jesus *is the way*.

When I went to my Biblical Dictionary and looked up John the Baptist, I only found two sentences. Finally a third one said, “See Jesus.” Despite the attention he aroused by his preaching, John continued to point to another, to one he called The Lamb of God. “See Jesus,” he said.

Then, not long after he succeeded in turning the eyes of others toward Jesus, John was gone from the public eye. He became victim to Herod’s pride and an adulterous woman’s desire for vengeance. Yet John had gone the way intended for him all along. He *decreased* in order that Jesus might *increase*.

And so, what lesson does John teach us? By his own admission, John is a humble guide who leads others to Jesus. Who points to Jesus as the one in whom God will work. “See Jesus,” he said to his own contemporaries. “See Jesus,” he says to each of us today.

Just like John, each and every one of us are wonderfully made and called to live our lives for a purpose. What is that purpose but to be Christ? To be his instruments so that when people listen to us speak, they hear the very words of Jesus. When they observe our actions, they see Jesus.

I am reminded of St. Teresa of Avila and her advice to those who came to her for direction:

Christ has no body now on earth but yours; no hands, but yours. Yours are the eyes through which he is to go about doing good. Yours are the hands with which he is to bless people now.

It is up to us now; Jesus called all of us to service in his name. As we serve Christ, we need to learn from John to reject the temptation to gain personal glory by the works we do in the name of Jesus.

A little story comes to mind. A person came up to me after Mass and showed me the front cover of the bulletin. It had the aerial view of our campus with the five main buildings clearly visible. The parish member said to me as he pointed to each of the buildings, “You must be one proud man, Father.” No, I don’t think I could say that! I am not proud. I am one grateful man; one very blessed man. Each one of these buildings reflects what God and his people have done. And besides, it’s not the building that’s important, it’s what takes place in the building—it’s those who enter that building and what takes place in their hearts.

All deeds of mercy and loving kindness come through the inspiration of the love of God. The very call of God to all people to be his instruments and serve on another in his name reminds us that all glory, laud and honor that might accrue to us belongs to God, not to us!

All Christian service glorifies the Risen and Reigning Lord. We must never forget that you and I serve God and one another in the name of Jesus Christ, not ourselves. It must always be that way. And so on this day, as we remember the birth of John the Baptist, it is fitting to pray to God to open our eyes to the scope of his mission in the world and to give praise and thanksgiving to God from whom all good things flow.