

Homily of the Nativity of St. John the Baptist June 24 2018, Year B

In Mathew 11:11, Jesus says of John, "Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist." What made Jesus to say that? Why does the Catholic Church celebrate John's birth as a solemnity?

John the Baptist played a very important role in humanity's salvation history. He was the last prophet of the Old Testament, and he ushered in the New Testament. He announced the coming of Jesus. John proclaimed, "One mightier than I is coming after me. I am not worthy to stoop and loosen the thongs of his sandals. I have baptized you with water, he will baptize you with the holy spirit" (Mark 7:7-8).

John preached repentance and prepared the people for the coming of Jesus. "He went throughout the whole region of the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin" (Luke 3:3). He said, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2). When Jesus arrived, John baptized him in the River Jordan (Mark 1:9-11).

John made Jesus known to the world when he said, "Behold the Lamb of God" (John 1:36). When John's disciples and followers left John and followed Jesus, John declared, "He must increase; I must decrease" (John 3:30).

John was ascetic. "He wore clothing made of camel's hair and a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey" (Matthew 3:4).

John not only preached to the crowd and baptized them, he also confronted, Herod, the corrupt ruler of his time for his unlawful marriage to Herodias. For speaking out the truth and standing by it, he was imprisoned and beheaded (Matthew 4:1-12).

What can we learn from the life of John the Baptist?

John invites us to repent of our sins, follow Jesus, the Lamb of God, and live up to our baptismal promises. John's words are very relevant to us today. "And the crowds asked him, 'What then should we do?' He said to them in reply, 'Whoever has two tunics should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise.' Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, 'Teacher, what should we do?' He answered them, 'Stop collecting more than what is prescribed.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And what is it that we should do?' He told them, 'Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages'" (Luke 3:10-14). John invites us to witness Jesus to others.

John's words, "He must increase; I must decrease," is very relevant to us today as it reminds us not to be afraid to let go when our time is up, not to be afraid to handover, not to be afraid of new ideas, not to be afraid of change, to acknowledge diminishment and expiration and give way to new life. There is no success if there is no successor. We see in our homes, in places of work and business and around us that, sometimes, people refuse to support, help or teach others because they can't stand seeing someone else progress more than they did. We see a lot of envy and jealousy and pulling down around us.

John's ascetic life, his feeding and clothing teach us simplicity of life. By his speaking and dying for the truth John teaches us to remain courageously, truthful even if we have to suffer for it

Lastly, the spiritual connection between Elizabeth and Zechariah must not escape our attention. Zechariah was deaf and dumb, yet when signs were made to him to name his child, he wrote the same name Elizabeth had named him. Such spiritual connection need to exist in our homes and among us, not discordant voices and discordant ideas.

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