

GOSPEL
Mark 1:1-8

The beginning of the Good News about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah:

Look, I am going to send my messenger before you;
 he will prepare your way.
 A voice cries in the wilderness:
 Prepare a way for the Lord,
 make his paths straight,

and so it was that John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. All Judaea and all the people of Jerusalem made their way to him, and as they were baptised by him in the river Jordan they confessed their sins. John wore a garment of camel-skin, and he lived on locusts and wild honey. In the course of his preaching he said, 'Someone is following me, someone who is more powerful than I am, and I am not fit to kneel down and undo the strap of his sandals. I have baptised you with water, but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit.'

REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS
10 December 2023

On this second Sunday of Advent, the Gospel speaks to us about John the Baptist, Jesus' precursor (cf. Mk 1:1-8), and it describes him to us as "the voice of one crying in the desert" (cf. v. 3). The desert, an empty place where one does not communicate, and the voice, a means for speaking, seem like two contradictory images. But they are joined in the Baptist.

The desert. John preaches there, near the Jordan River, near the place where his people had entered the promised land many centuries earlier (cf. Joshua 3:1-17). In so doing, it is as if he were saying: to listen to God, we must return to the place where, for 40 years, he accompanied, protected and educated his people, in the desert. That is the place of silence and essentials, where one cannot afford to dwell on useless things, but needs to concentrate on what is indispensable in order to live.

And this is an ever relevant reminder: to proceed on the journey of life, we need to be stripped of the

"extra", because living well does not mean filling oneself with useless things, but being freed from the superfluous, to dig deeply within ourselves so as to hold on to what is truly important before God. Only if, through silence and prayer, we make space for Jesus, who is the Word of the Father, will we know how to free ourselves from the pollution of vain words and gossip. Silence and sobriety — in words, in the use of things, in the media and social media — these are not just *fioretti* [translator's note: a common practice in Italian devotional life in which someone offers a small sacrifice, a resolution, or the proposal to do a good deed to Our Lord or Our Lady] or virtues; they are essential elements of the Christian life.

And we come to the second image, the voice. This is the means by which we manifest what we think and what we bear in our hearts. We understand, therefore, that it is quite connected with silence, because it expresses what matures inside, from listening to what the Spirit suggests. Brothers and sisters, if one does not know how to be quiet, it is unlikely that one will have something good to say; while, the more attentive the silence, the stronger the word. In John the Baptist that voice is linked to the genuineness of his experience and the purity of his heart.

We can ask ourselves: What place does silence have in my days? Is it an empty, perhaps oppressive, silence? Or is it a space for listening, for prayer, for guarding my heart? Is my life sober or filled with superfluous things? Even if it means going against the tide, let us value silence, sobriety and listening. May Mary, Virgin of silence, help us to love the desert, to become credible voices who proclaim her Son who is coming.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

What stood out to you from the Gospel or Reflection/ Homily?



Head: Pope Francis says that silence and listening are essential parts of the Christian life. Why do you think silence can feel difficult in today's world, and what might we miss when we avoid it?



Heart: Pope Francis asks whether our lives are filled with what is essential or crowded by what is superfluous. What noise, distraction, or habit most gets in the way of your relationship with God, and what would change if you gave it less space?



Hands: What is one thing you could set aside this week to make more room for God, and how might that create space for him to speak into your life?

PRAYER

Spend some time in prayer with one another:

1. Conscious of what has just been shared, members briefly name/ describe their prayer needs.
2. Intentionally call on the Holy Spirit to be present (for example, “Come Holy Spirit, please be present as we pray”)
3. Offer prayers of thanks and praise to God.
4. Pray for each others’ prayer needs. Where appropriate, you may like to encourage the group to place a hand on the shoulder of the individual that you are currently praying for.
5. Conclude your prayer time with another prayer of praise, perhaps praying the ‘Glory Be.’