

GOSPEL*John 1:6-8, 19-28*

A man came, sent by God.
His name was John.
He came as a witness,
as a witness to speak for the light,
so that everyone might believe through him.
He was not the light,
only a witness to speak for the light.

This is how John appeared as a witness. When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ he not only declared, but he declared quite openly, ‘I am not the Christ.’ ‘Well then,’ they asked, ‘are you Elijah?’ ‘I am not,’ he said. ‘Are you the Prophet?’ He answered, ‘No.’ So they said to him, ‘Who are you? We must take back an answer to those who sent us. What have you to say about yourself?’ So John said, ‘I am, as Isaiah prophesied:

a voice that cries in the wilderness:
Make a straight way for the Lord.’

Now these men had been sent by the Pharisees, and they put this further question to him, ‘Why are you baptising if you are not the Christ, and not Elijah, and not the prophet?’ John replied, ‘I baptise with water; but there stands among you – unknown to you – the one who is coming after me; and I am not fit to undo his sandal-strap.’ This happened at Bethany, on the far side of the Jordan, where John was baptising.

REFLECTION BY POPE FRANCIS*17 December 2023*

Today, the Third Sunday of Advent, the Gospel speaks to us about John the Baptist’s mission (cf. Jn 1:6-8, 19-28), indicating that he is the prophet sent by God to “bear witness to the light” (v. 8). Let us reflect on this: to bear witness to the light.

The Baptist is certainly an extraordinary man. People flock to listen to him, attracted by his consistent and sincere way of being (cf. vv. 6-7). His witness comes through his frank language, his honest behaviour, his austerity of life. All this makes him different from other famous and powerful people of the time, who, instead, invested a lot in appearances. People like him — honest, free and courageous — are luminous, fascinating figures: they motivate us to rise above mediocrity and be in turn models of good living for

others. In every age, the Lord sends men and women like this. Do we know how to recognize them? Do we try to learn from their witness, allowing ourselves to be challenged? Or do we allow ourselves to be bedazzled by fashionable people and get caught in artificial behaviour?

Instead John is luminous because he bears witness to the light. But what is his light? He himself gives us the answer when he clearly tells the crowds who had flocked to hear him that he is not the light, that he is not the Messiah (cf. vv. 19-20). The light is Jesus, the Lamb of God, “God who saves”. Only he redeems, frees, heals and enlightens. This is why John is a “voice” who accompanies his brothers and sisters to the Word. He serves without seeking honours or the spotlight. He is a lamp, while the light is the living Christ (cf. vv. 26-27; Jn 5:35).

Brothers and sisters, the example of John the Baptist teaches us at least two things. First, that we cannot save ourselves alone: only in God do we find the light of life. And second, that each of us, through service, consistency, humility, witness of life — and always by God’s grace — can be a lamp that shines and helps others find the way on which to meet Jesus.

Let us thus ask ourselves: How can I bear witness to the light, bear witness to Christ, in the places where I live, now, this very Christmas, not in a distant future?

May Mary, mirror of holiness, help us be men and women who reflect Jesus, the light who comes into the world.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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



Head: John the Baptist knew he was not the Messiah, but a witness to the light. What does his example teach us about humility and the role of every Christian in helping others encounter Jesus?



Heart: John was content to point people towards Jesus rather than himself. Where do you find it hardest to let go of recognition, control, or being noticed?



Hands: Who is one person you could intentionally point towards Jesus this week, and what might that look like in practice?

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’.