

23. June 2022

## Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist John's testimony

*NOTE: Since this year the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart of Jesus falls on 24 June, the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist was postponed to today.*

*Acts 13:16,22-26*

*Paul stood up, raised his hand for silence and began to speak: 'Men of Israel, and fearers of God, listen! After he deposed Saul and raised up David to be king, whom he attested in these words, "I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will perform my entire will." To keep his promise, God has raised up for Israel one of David's descendants, Jesus, as Saviour, whose coming was heralded by John when he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the whole people of Israel. Before John ended his course he said, "I am not the one you imagine me to be; there is someone coming after me whose sandal I am not fit to undo." My brothers, sons of Abraham's race, and all you godfearers, this message of salvation is meant for you.'*

In the liturgical cycle, only three births are celebrated: that of the Lord, that of the Virgin Mary and that of John the Baptist. This indicates the great importance the Church accords to the one who was the Forerunner of Christ's coming.

John the Baptist was chosen by God already in his mother's womb. Extraordinary things had happened around his birth, which reached the ears of many (cf. Lk 1:65-66). Later his mission led him into the desert, where he baptised and called people to conversion (cf. Mt 3,1-2). In the life of John the Baptist, conversion is the key concept, for he represented the Law of God. Conversion means placing one's whole life under God's dominion and doing penance for sins committed.

No doubt we could not subsist without God's forgiveness; but true reconciliation with Him can only come about if man acknowledges his sins, repents, confesses them and asks for forgiveness.

If this was the condition in John's time, it holds good even after the coming of the Messiah. It is clear that Jesus made it easier for us to receive forgiveness and showed us God's mercy with unprecedented clarity. However, the demand to turn away from sin and to sincerely accept the offer of grace remains.

John was able to witness the coming of the One for whom he had prepared the way. Once he recognised Him as "the One who was to come" (cf. Mt 11:2-6), John knew that he had to 'decrease' so that He might grow (cf. Jn 3:30). This means that he had to step back from his proclamation, since, in the coming of the Son of God, what he had announced had been fulfilled.

At the end of his days, John sealed his extraordinary prophetic witness by giving his life for the truth. He did not hesitate to reproach Herod for his way of life, which was contrary to the commandments of the Lord (cf. Mk 6:18). His courage cost him his life, for Herodias, who resented him for having declared her relationship with the king unlawful (cf. Mk 6:19), seized the opportunity to take revenge on him.

John's testimony can still raise questions for us today.... Does the Baptist's firm stance on moral questions still stand today, or have things changed with the passage of time?

Today we can see that in many countries the Church is adopting a more liberal position, which is often justified in the name of greater mercy. Few still dare to point out disordered living situations and call people to conversion.

However, the commandments of God have not changed after the coming of Jesus. He not only confirmed them, but even increased the demands, making it clear to us that sin can already be committed in the intention when it is not restrained (cf. Mt 5:28).

We see, then, that John the Baptist's message has not lost its relevance.

In the spiritual life it is important to always listen to the Holy Spirit, and to understand our life as a constant process of conversion. God wants to dwell and penetrate more and more in us. He gives us every facility, but He wants us to be moved by grace and to cooperate with it.

Also today we have to hold on to the revealed Truth, and, if God allows us to come to such a situation, even to be ready to give our lives for it. In the case of John the Baptist, he suffered martyrdom for his faithfulness to God's commandments. We could also say that he was a martyr for the sanctity of marriage.

How important this witness is, especially in our day, when attacks on marriage come from all sides! Thank you, St. John!