

14. January 2025

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN
"The Friend of the Bridegroom"

Jn 3:22-30

After this Jesus and his disciples went into the land of Judea; there he remained with them and baptized. John also was baptizing at Ae'non near Salim, because there was much water there; and people came and were baptized. For John had not yet been put in prison. Now a discussion arose between John's disciples and a Jew over purifying. And they came to John, and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you beyond the Jordan, to whom you bore witness, here he is, baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him. He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full. He must increase, but I must decrease."

"All are going to Him..."

People were drawn to the presence of Jesus. The word had spread about the signs He was performing and people came to the right conclusion: they should and would come to Him.

John the Baptist not only agreed, for there was no room for envy in the heart of this prophet, but he confessed once again: "I am not the Christ" and made it clear that *"No one can receive anything except what is given him from heaven"*. And then John spoke these thought-provoking words: *"He who has the bride is the bridegroom; the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice; therefore this joy of mine is now full."*

This is the selfless voice of a holy prophet. He recognised Jesus because God revealed Him to him, and now he is filled with joy at the coming of the long-awaited Messiah. John understood that the prophecies were being fulfilled before his eyes and that the Lord Himself had visited His people. He came as the bridegroom to the bride. The

Baptist could hardly have expressed it more tenderly when he compared the coming of Jesus with what the people understood to be the greatest happiness in the earthly plan. And indeed it is just as John said: the Bridegroom of humanity came to lead her to the marriage of the Lamb. He Himself redeemed her from her bondage at the price of His blood, so that, cleansed from her stains, she might be united to Him forever.

John must have glimpsed all this in the Holy Spirit, for everything he says about Jesus and himself is obviously illuminated by Him. He knows that his mission is now coming to an end, and he knows that he has helped to prepare his people for the coming of the Bridegroom. His heart is full of joy; indeed, his joy is complete, as he himself testifies.

Perhaps we can sense something of the heavenly joy that must have filled John: the joy of knowing the One for whom he had lived; the joy of having served Him and thus fulfilled the task that the heavenly Father had given him.

But, no doubt, it is also the spiritual delight in the Lord Himself, in seeing what He is like, in hearing His words and in witnessing His works.

John certainly wanted to pass on to others all the joy he experienced. You can see it in his words. He thought of himself as the "friend of the bridegroom" and as such he praised Him with wonderful words to the bride in order to win her heart and increase her love for Him.

Is it not the same with us? Once we have come to know Jesus, is it not our greatest desire to make Him known to others as He is?

Can we be silent about all the good works He has done for people and continues to do through His disciples to this day?

As friends of the Bridegroom, how can we fail to speak of Jesus' unfailing love for His heavenly Father, who sent Him into the world to redeem us? How can we be silent about His immeasurable love for us human beings, which led Him to the Cross to save us? Can we not say that faith in Jesus is the salvation of mankind, for "*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12)?

No, we cannot and must not. As friends of the Bridegroom, we cannot remain silent, any more than John the Baptist or the Apostles could. Peter and John, even under threat of punishment, exclaimed before the Sanhedrin: "*for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20).

We need that joy for the Bridegroom which filled John's heart, as well as his fidelity; the fidelity of a friend of Jesus who does everything in his power to serve Him wholeheartedly.

For this, we can ask the intercession of the 'friend of the Bridegroom', who immediately bowed down when he recognised the Messiah: He must increase and I must decrease.