

Gospel for 2 January: The Voice's Effectiveness

Gospel for January 2nd, and
commentary.

Gospel (*Jn* 1:19-28)

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, “Who are you?” He confessed, he did not deny, but confessed, “I am not the Christ.” And they asked him, “What then? Are you Elijah?” He said, “I am not.” “Are you the prophet?” And he answered, “No.” They said to him then, “Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What

do you say about yourself?” He said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as the prophet Isaiah said.”

Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. They asked him, “Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?” John answered them, “I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know, even he who comes after me, the thong of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”

This took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

Commentary

John the Baptist is one of the protagonists of the Advent and

Christmas seasons. He is both a prophet and a disciple of the Messiah. His influence was so effective and he spoke and acted so forcefully that the Pharisees sent priests to find out his identity: “Who are you?” This is a question that we find several times in Saint John’s gospel. It is really about the identity of Jesus, on which so many things depend, including our entire life.

But in this passage we are concerned about the Baptist’s identity, which in some way reflects, prepares for and illuminates the identity of Jesus.

Responding to the Levites’ questions and hypotheses, the Baptist answers: “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness.” Saint Augustine emphasizes that John was the voice, but our Lord is the Word existing from the beginning (cf. *Jn* 1:1).

Without the word, what good is the voice? The voice may reach the ear,

but without words it doesn't edify the heart. Moreover, John is the voice that "cries" in the wilderness, amid the aridity of a world thirsting for salvation.

John's confession suggests something to us about our own identity, specifically the importance of being true apostles. Christians are called not primarily to transmit a moral message, to teach dogmas of faith, but to make Christ manifest in their own life. A Christian is the voice crying out in the desert that is often found in our world today, pointing to "Immanuel, God-with-us."

This is what the saints have done since the beginning of the Church. Saint Paul exclaimed: "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (*1 Cor* 2:2). And Saint Josemaría said that "mine is to hide and disappear, so

that only Jesus shines forth” (*Letter*, 28 January 1975).

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