

Meditations: Baptism of the Lord

Some reflections that can assist our prayer on the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The topics are: bearing witness to Christ, like John; a discreet apostolate, one-on-one; sowing with our friendship.

- Bearing witness to Christ, like John
- A discreet apostolate, one-on-one
- Sowing with our friendship

THE NEXT day, [John] saw Jesus coming toward him (Jn 1:29). Our Lord goes to meet John as one among many, mixed with the thousands who came from everywhere. “Jesus Christ, who is the Judge of sinners, comes to be baptized among the slaves.”^[1] For that multitude, the carpenter from Nazareth was just a person in the crowd. But John’s gaze discovered the Son of God in that pilgrim, and he hesitated to baptize him. *I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me? (Mt 3:14).* Jesus insisted, and John, in the end, had to agree.

And when Jesus was baptized, he went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, ‘This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased’ (Mt 3:16). St. John Paul II said, “John's preaching concluded

the long preparation, which traversed the entire Old Covenant and, one could say, all human history narrated in Sacred Scriptures. John felt the greatness of that decisive moment, which he interpreted as the beginning of a new creation, where he discovered the presence of the Spirit hovering above the first creation (cf. Jn 1:32; Gen 1:2). He knew and confessed that he was a mere herald, precursor, and minister of the One who would come to ‘baptize with the Holy Spirit.’”^[2]

A few days later, John received a unique delegation. St. Josemaria wrote: “Do you recall the scenes recounted in the Gospel of John the Baptist’s preaching? What a lot of gossip there was going on! Is he the Christ? Is he Elijah? Is he a Prophet? So many rumours were flying around that *the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’* (Jn 1:19).”^[3] And John

replied, *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 (Jn 1:26-27).*

To us too, Jesus revealed Himself when He showed us, with the light of the Holy Spirit, that He was beside us on the journey of life. Then, like John, He asked us to bear witness to Him.

JOHN THE Baptist's whole life was spent waiting, preparing his heart and others' for the Redeemer's arrival. His has been the voice crying in the wilderness: *Prepare the way for the Lord, make his paths straight (Mt 3:3).* Today, John's joy is great because the Lord has come; now he can exclaim, *This is the one I spoke about. He who comes after me has*

surpassed me because he was before me (Jn 1:30). Our task is not very different from John's. “Those words from the Gospel could be repeated many times [...] when the evangelist describes John the Baptist's preaching. They kicked up a fuss. Was He Christ, Elijah, or a Prophet? So many rumours were flying around that *the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, ‘Who are you?’ (Jn 1:19).* And John replied, *I baptize with water; but among you stands one whom you do not know (Jn 1:26).* Without any show, with supernatural naturalness, Christ makes himself present in your life and in your word to attract to faith and love those who know little or nothing about Faith or Love.”^[4]

John bears witness to Jesus; a few days earlier, he had publicly declared that he was not the Messiah and that the Christ would come later. Then, in the intimate circle of his

disciples, John discovered where Jesus was: *This is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!* (Jn 1:29). It was an apostolate from one person to another, preparing his listeners' hearts for the divine call. On another occasion, more directly, the Baptist pointed Jesus out to John and Andrew: *The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, 'Look, the Lamb of God!'* The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus (John 1:35-37). His effectiveness is impressive. John the Baptist's words prepared the first two apostolic vocations. Later, Andrew and John would bring others.

It's easy for us to recall some words of St. Josemaría about the apostolate of Christians in the midst of the world: "They do not know you, but in every corner of the earth, colleagues and friends discover Christ in your

brothers and in you; and then they also bring Christ to other hearts, to other minds. You are Christ passing by in the street; but you must tread where He trod.”^[5]

MANY PEOPLE came to the Jordan to listen and receive John's baptism. The prophet had words of light for everyone, and he prepared them all to receive the Lord. But he also had a small group of disciples whom he formed in the warmth of direct conversation. The first followers of the Lord emerged from that group.

Each of us knows many other people, and sometimes, we can spread the message of Christ among a very broad audience through various means. But what St. Josemaria called the “apostolate of friendship and confidence” is particularly suited to

spreading the Christian message. He described it thus: “You have to bring souls close to God with the appropriate word that awakens apostolic horizons, with your discreet advice that helps them look at a problem in a Christian way, with a friendly conversation that shows them how to practice charity. [...] But you have to attract others above all by the integrity of your lives, with the affirmation – humble and daring at the same time – of living among your equals in an ordinary but consistent way, showing our faith in our deeds. This, with God’s help, will be the reason for our effectiveness.”^[6]

Christian apostolate is service, spreading goodness, friendship; sincere concern for others, informed by charity, leading us to transmit what fills our lives with joy. The laity, in particular, are called to “free and responsible action within the

temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity.”^[7] The panorama before us is immense.

We can place the people closest to us under our Lady’s maternal protection. We also ask her to obtain for us the grace needed to sow the divine word through our friendship. “Sow, then,” St. Josemaría said. “I assure you, in the name of the Lord of the harvest, that there will be a harvest.”^[8]

^[1] St. John Chrysostom, Homilies on the Gospel of St. Matthew, 12, 1.

^[2] St. John Paul II, General Audience, July 11, 1990.

^[3] St. Josemaría, Letter, March 24, 1939.

^[4] St. Josemaría, Letter August 15, 1953, no. 11.

^[5] St. Josemaría, Notes from a family meeting, January 9, 1969.

^[6] St. Josemaría, Letter March 24, 1930, no. 11.

^[7] St. Josemaría, *Conversations*, no. 59.

^[8] St. Josemaría, Letter, March 24, 1939.
