

24. June 2020

**Feast of the Birth of Saint John the Baptist
“John's testimony”**

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.'

As we know, only three birthdays have entered the church liturgy: The birthdays of the Lord, the Mother of God and St. John the Baptist. This shows what importance the Church attaches to the "forerunner of the coming of Christ".

John was already chosen by God before his birth; strange things had happened around his birth, which were told about everywhere (*cf. Lk 1,65-66*). His official mission then took him to the desert, where he baptized and led people to repentance (*cf. Mt 3,1-2*).

Conversion is a key concept in the life of John the Baptist, because he represented the law of the Lord. Repentance means to be called to consciously place one's whole life under the lordship of God and to repent of sins.

Without doubt, we live by God's readiness to forgive, but true reconciliation with God is possible only when we human beings recognize, confess, repent and ask for forgiveness of our sins.

This was the case in the days of the Baptist and has not changed even after the coming of the Messiah. Although in Jesus an easy way is paved for us to receive forgiveness and God's mercy has become much more transparent to us, the demand remains to turn away from the ways of sin and to sincerely accept God's offer of grace.

John was allowed to see the coming of the Messiah, for whom he prepared the way. When he recognized him - Jesus gave him answers to his question whether he was the one who was coming - John knew that he must 'grow less' in order for Him to grow (*cf. Jn 3,30*). This means that he had to take a step back with his message, because the fulfilment of what he had proclaimed took place in the coming of the Son of God!

At the end of his life John gives the outstanding testimony of a prophet who gives his life for the truth. He was not afraid to reproach Herod for his way of life, which was contrary to the instructions of the Lord (*cf. Mk 6,18*). This cost him his life when he felt the vengeance of Herodias, who never forgave him for questioning her connection with Herod (*cf. Mk 6,19*).

John's testimony can ask us questions today. Is this decisive attitude of the Baptist still valid today, or has something changed in the course of time?

In any case, today in some countries a more "liberal attitude" seems to be spreading in the Church, often justified by the attitude of greater mercy. In such cases people dare less and less to call disordered living conditions as such and to call people to conversion accordingly.

The Polish Bishops' Conference gave us a good testimony. Contrary to the tendency of some Bishops and Episcopal Conferences to allow even the so-called "remarried divorced" to receive Holy Communion under certain circumstances without obliging them to live in chastity, they called for conversion in the way of life. In doing so, they placed themselves in the line of the previous teaching and practice of the Church.

The commandments of God have not changed after the coming of Jesus. He not only confirmed them, but made it even clearer to us that we already can sin in our intentions if they are bad and we follow them (*cf. Mt 5,28*).

The message of the Baptist is also important for us today!

It is important for our spiritual life to always listen to the Holy Spirit and to understand life as a constant process of conversion. More and more God wants to dwell in us and penetrate us. He makes it easy for us, but He also wants us to follow and cooperate with grace!

Also today we need the readiness to hold on to the revealed truth and also - if God should let it happen in this way - to give our life for it. In the case of St. John the Baptist it was martyrdom for the observance of God's commandments, we could also say: for the holiness of marriage!

What an important testimony, especially in this day and age when attacks on marriage come from all sides!

Thank you, John!