

Rorate Coeli
24 December, Anno Domini 2017
St. John 1:19-28
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In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

John the Baptist provides us with a marvelous picture of true Christian humility. He had every opportunity to gain immense recognition for himself. He could have claimed even the office of Messiah for himself. That's what his questioners thought he might be. John's demeanor and preaching was striking enough to ignite the imaginations of anyone who heard or saw him. And we can't forget that from the time of his conception, John had been somewhat of a spectacle. His mother and father were both well-past child-bearing years. And Zechariah had been struck with sudden muteness after the visit of Gabriel. And then, at the first chance Zechariah had to speak he uttered what we now know as the Benedictus extolling the great mercy and faithfulness of God and speaking of his son as the prophet of the Most High, who would go before the Lord to prepare His way by bringing knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins.

John was no ordinary man. But then, again, as we saw last week, he was. And John himself knew it. He was no Christ. He was a sinner who needed a Christ. God had appointed him to prepare the way of the Christ, not be the Christ. And by God's grace, John stuck to the plan. He was very clear about who he was and who he was not. He was definitely not the Christ. But he was the voice, the forerunner, whom God had sent to tell everyone that the Christ was no longer just a future promise but a present reality. For that reason alone the Baptizer deserves our honor and our remembrance.

But he didn't want it. He wanted everyone to know clearly who the Christ really is - Jesus of Nazareth, Mary's son. That was John's concern, that everyone knew very clearly who the Messiah was and what he had come to do. Listen to John. Let him show you who your Messiah is. Follow his voice and his finger to Jesus because He and no one else is the one promised and sent by God to deliver you.

Consider how gracious God is to send preachers like John ahead of the Christ. John was sent to get people's attention, to stir us out of slumber, so

that we didn't miss the day of our salvation, to turn us away from our wicked arrogance and sin, to create in us a hunger for the salvation that can only be given by God's Christ. There was nothing about Jesus that screamed Messiah. Jesus even came with all the people to be baptized by John. He didn't stand out in the crowd. He looked like everyone else, spoke like everyone else, dressed like everyone else. If He hadn't been, if He had presented Himself as sinful man expects a Messiah, then sinful man would never be sure that Jesus is for him. Jesus is the Savior of sinners - poor, miserable, broken, hurting, humble sinners. Jesus is from among us, a prophet like Moses from among our brethren, who speaks the truth of God, whose very existence along with His preaching, reveals the mercy of God the Father for sinners.

But too often we are like the stubborn Pharisees who don't want a Savior. We think we want flash and pomp and unbridled glory. We look for saviors who promise to glorify us and praise our own righteousness and are impressed by us. We become enamored with those who look, who dress, and who act holy and righteous. We are drawn to the successful, the beautiful, the famous, and the powerful. We long for rulers who will protect us and serve our interests. All because we really want to be our own savior. We want to believe that we are something, that there is at least some, if not a lot, of good in us that is praiseworthy. We love it when people complement us and sing our praises. Who wouldn't be tempted if they were John and the religious elites came acknowledging our greatness and wondering if we weren't the Christ or Elijah or the Prophet?

Pride and self-worship are terrible, deadly sins. They blind us in two ways. First, they blind us to our sin. They convince us that our sins are really only small problems from which we can save ourselves. They teach us that we are strong, that we know better, that admitting our brokenness and our need for salvation is a sign of weakness. They seal our lips so that we refuse to pray, confess, sing, and speak to God. Second, having thus blinded us to our sin, they blind us to our Christ, our Messiah, our Savior. The Lord Jesus is filled with humility and weakness. He is not a man interested in impressing us or being impressed by us. He isn't impressed with shows of stoic disinterest, or the cold-hearted pursuit of human improvement. In truth, nothing could be more insulting to our Lord than for us to stand before the One who left His heavenly throne to save us and try to convince Him that we don't really need Him to do that. That's what the Pharisees, the Levites, and the priests were too busy doing and why they

simply couldn't accept Christ and were thus condemned. They already had their savior - themselves. Everything about Jesus was an absolute affront to everything they believed and held dear. And what is so terribly sad is that everything they held dear was given by God to point them to Jesus. Only those who humble themselves before God, who allow the Law to expose the wickedness of their thoughts and their deeds, who confess before God that they are nothing and have nothing can see Jesus and rejoice that He is the Savior sent by God. That is why Jesus' humble birth to a humble mother brings us great joy because it the first evidence given that the Lord had come for the likes of us sinners, that He wouldn't despise us poor wretches. Instead, it is proof of God's love for us, proof that He would draw near to us in our guilt and our death and bring us hope and life.

That is the Savior to whom John pointed. John knew that he couldn't save us any more than he could save himself. And thus for his own sake as well as for yours and mine and all sinners, John confessed boldly and confidently, "I am not the Christ but among you stands another, next to whom I, as great as you think I am, am nothing but the lowest of servants. Jesus. Look to Him. Listen to Him. He is greater than Moses, than Elijah, than any of us because He is the Lord God in our human flesh, promised of old and foretold by Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, Malachi, and all the prophets, who has come to conquer death and open the gates of everlasting life. He alone is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world, who is the source of God's mercy and blessing, through whom we have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit who is given in Holy Baptism."

John is not the Christ. You are not the Christ. But among you, here in your very midst, in this very place, in these very words, stands the one who is, Jesus Christ, whose voice you hear, whose very Body and Blood is the true manna from heaven in this wilderness given to keep you and sustain you on your journey to the Promised Land. It is He who forgives all your sins. It is He who speaks the Word of the Father so that you can not only know the Father in truth, but even be one with the Father by the Holy Spirit. Listen to Him. Do not despise Him because He doesn't come with shows of great power or because He doesn't make you feel better about yourself or because He doesn't magically fix all your problems. Don't despise Him because He doesn't bring with Him success or your best life now. He brings life through the cross. We must die to ourselves and our own vain notions of self-importance. With Christ we must crucify the desires of our flesh for pleasure and self-promotion. These are useless and keep us from

the Christ. And thus we rejoice in our afflictions because it is through our afflictions that we are delivered and kept safe from this world. It is through suffering and testing that we are drawn to Jesus and kept near to Him as the devil assails us.

Let us then, with rejoicing, with John and all who have gone before us in the faith, confess and not deny but confess confidently and boldly before the world and in the face of Satan himself "I am not the Christ. Jesus of Nazareth, He is alone is the Christ, the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. It is in Him, with His Father and the Holy Spirit that I believe and in whom I put all my trust and hope." May God grant each of us faithfulness so that whatever our station in life may be, our only joy may be to receive the Christ in faith and point others away from ourselves and to the true and only Christ, Jesus, Mary's Son.

In the Name of +Jesus.