

Saturday after Epiphany

Gospel text (Jn 3,22-30): After this, Jesus went into the territory of Judea with his disciples. He stayed there with them and baptized. John was also baptizing in Aenon near Salim where water was plentiful; people came to him and were baptized. This happened before John was put in prison.

Now John's disciples had been questioned by a Jew about spiritual cleansing, so they came to him and said, «Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, and about whom you spoke favorably, is now baptizing and all are going to him». John answered, «No one can take on anything except what has been given him from heaven. You yourselves are my witnesses that I said: ‘I am not the Christ but I have been sent before him’. Only the bridegroom has the bride; but the friend of the bridegroom stands by and listens, and rejoices to hear the bridegroom’s voice. My joy is now full. It is necessary that he increase but that I decrease».

«It is necessary that he increase but that I decrease»

Fr. Antoni CAROL i Hostench
(Sant Cugat del Vallès, Barcelona, Spain)

Today, we are surprised to see both Jesus and John baptizing "side by side". We say "side by side", although... actually, this is only in appearance, because John the Baptist refers us to Jesus, who is the Messiah, the "new Moses", the long-awaited Prophet, he who comes over to bring God to us. «What has He [Jesus] brought? The answer is very simple: God. He has brought God» (Benedict XVI).

Consequently, and immediately, John spells out the substance of baptism: in fact, it is purification, but «it differs from the customary religious ablutions» performed those days, and -as Pope Benedict asserted- «it must be the material culmination of

a change determining a new way of life forever and ever». Therefore the Christian baptism stands for a radical change under the figure of a new birth. A new beginning in life.

Purification, definitely, but to put off the "old man", to die oneself and -because of God's Grace- be born to a new life altogether: the divine life, something that «no one can take on anything except what has been given him from heaven» (Jn 3,28). The second council of Orange teaches us that «it is wholly a gift of God to love God. He, who loves, even though he is not loved, allowed himself to be loved. We are loved, even when we displease him, so that we might have means to please him».

Hence, our long-life task for sanctity: to grow deep in humility, open up God's will for us and let Him guide us. It is not as important what I can do as it is that He leads me: «It is necessary that He increase but that I decrease» (Jn 3,30). And the fuller our joy will grow as the more immaterial I turn into and the Spouse becomes closer to our heart and to our deeds.