June 24th: Solemnity of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

Gospel text (*Lk* 1:57-66.80): When the time arrived for Elizabeth to have her child she gave birth to a son. Her neighbors and relatives heard that the Lord had shown his great mercy toward her, and they rejoiced with her. When they came on the eighth day to circumcise the child, they were going to call him Zechariah after his father, but his mother said in reply, “No. He will be called John.” But they answered her, “There is no one among your relatives who has this name.” So they made signs, asking his father what he wished him to be called. He asked for a tablet and wrote, “John is his name,” and all were amazed. Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God. Then fear came upon all their neighbors, and all these matters were discussed throughout the hill country of Judea. All who heard these things took them to heart, saying, “What, then, will this child be?” For surely the hand of the Lord was with him. The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel.

“The child grew and became strong in spirit”

Fr. Joan MARTÍNEZ Porcel
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Today, we solemnly celebrate the Nativity of the Baptist. St. John is a man of contrasts: he lives in the silence of the desert, but right from there he appeals to the crowds with convincing voice inviting them to convert; he is humble enough to say he is only the voice, not the Word, but he does not mince his words and dares to accuse and denounce all injustices even to the very king; he urges his disciples to meet with Jesus, but he does not mind rebuking king Herod while he is in prison. Silent and humble, he is also strong and courageous enough to shed his blood. John the Baptist is a great man! the greatest of them all, as Jesus himself will say in praise, but he is only Christ's precursor.

Perhaps, the secret of his greatness is the realization of knowing he has been chosen by God; this is how the evangelist explains it: “The child grew and became strong in spirit, and he was in the desert until the day of his manifestation to Israel” (Lk 1:80). All his childhood and youth was marked by the understanding of his mission: to provide testimony; which he does by baptizing Christ in the river Jordan, by favorably disposing the crowds for the Lord and, at the end of his life, by shedding his blood in favor of the truth. With our knowledge about John, we could answer the question his contemporary was wondering about:

“What, then, will this child be?” (Lk 1:66).

Through the baptism, we have all been chosen and sent to bear witness of the Lord. In an environment of indifference, St. John is a helping example to imitate; St. Augustine says: “Admire John as much as you can for, whom you admire is profitable to Christ. I insist, he is profitable to Christ, not because you offer anything to Him, but because of your being able to progress in Him”. In John, his attitude as a Messenger, clearly explicit in attentive prayer to the Spirit, in his fortitude and humility, helps us to establish new horizons of sanctity for us and for our brother.

Thoughts on Today's Gospel

- "‘I am the voice of one crying out in the desert.’ John was the voice, but the Lord is the Word that existed since the beginning of all things. John was a passing voice; Christ is the Eternal Word, from the beginning.” (Saint Augustine)

- “How many people pay dearly for their commitment to truth! How many just men prefer to go against the current, so as not to deny the voice of conscience, the voice of truth!” (Francis)

- “St. John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way. ‘Prophet of the Most High’ (Lk 1:76), surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last. He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", (Jn 3:29) whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world’ (Jn 1:29). Going before Jesus ‘in the spirit and power of Elijah’ (Lk 1:17), John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, No. 523)