

## 12<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Ordinary Time

June 24, 2018

Brothers and sisters, today we are introduced to the cultural community of Israel in the early days of John and Jesus: the birth and naming ceremony of John the Baptist.

We witness the marvelous work of God to Elizabeth and Zachariah, and how the community rallies around them.

Children of God rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn.

According to Jewish culture, every male child is circumcised on the eighth day, then a name is given to him. A name in the cultural world which Israel is part of, is not given randomly. Every name reflects a family history or what happened at the time of birth. For this very reason, they called him John, which means "Yahweh has shown me favor". The name was given to him by angel Raphael before John was conceived.

John the Baptist's role and importance in the salvific economy is clear and so is his recognition – he is the only saint whose birth the church celebrates with solemnity; which takes place on the 24th of June, six months before Christmas.

The roles and missions of John the Baptist in the salvific economy were clearly spelled out even though they are not easy to accomplish. His main tasks included:

- To preach the gospel of repentance.
- To announce the coming of Christ by preparing the way of the Lord.
- To present Jesus to the waiting world and remind Jesus that he, Jesus, is the lamb to be sacrificed for the salvation of the world.
- To baptize the Savior of the world, thereby preparing and sending him forth to pray and fast in preparation for Christ's proper mission.
- To baptize those who have repented of their sins.
- To announce the imminence of God's final judgment – reward and punishment. Each person is to be reprimanded according to his or her deeds.
- To restore the prophetic voice of authority and simplicity to Israel – in the likeness of the spirit of Elijah.
- To teach the children of Israel the power of humility even though he was the greatest of all born of a woman.

Of particular interest is the wonder which resounded among those present at John's naming ceremony: "What will this child turn out to be?" This is a universally human question because it calls for a reflective conscious awareness. "What will I turn out to be?" is one of those self-conscious questions which should be noticeably placed on refrigerator doors – along with other reflective questions such as:

- Who did God make me to be?
- Who am I?
- What is my purpose in life and
- What is God's purpose in my life?
- Am I in partnership with God to the actualization of God's purpose for my life?

Even though there are many enticing and contradictive voices in the world, am I able to focus on the mission God entrusted to me? Can my actions speak better than my words in my prophetic mission?

As prophets of our God, his purpose for us aligns with his purpose for John the Baptist: God wants us to make Christ known, to point him out. He wants to prepare the way of the Lord from inside out.

God wants us to use our words and actions to lead others to Jesus. He wants us to proclaim but also to forgive.

Below is Zachariah's song of thanksgiving for the gift of John - at John's birth – Together let us proclaim the goodness of the Lord.

### **The Canticle of Zechariah**

Blessed be the Lord,  
The God of Israel;  
He has come to His people and set them free.

He has raised up for us a mighty Saviour,  
Born of the house of His servant David.

Through His holy prophets He promised of old  
That He would save us from our enemies,  
From the hands of all who hate us.

He promised to show mercy to our fathers  
And to remember His holy Covenant.

This was the oath He swore to our father Abraham:  
To set us free from the hands of our enemies,  
Free to worship Him without fear,  
Holy and righteous in His sight  
All the days of our life.

You, My child shall be called  
The prophet of the Most High,  
For you will go before the Lord to prepare His way,  
To give his people knowledge of salvation  
By the forgiveness of their sins.

In the tender compassion of our Lord  
The dawn from on high shall break upon us,  
to shine on those who dwell in darkness  
And the shadow of death,  
And to guide our feet into the way of peace.

Glory to the Father,  
and to the Son,  
and to the Holy Spirit.  
As it was in the beginning.  
is now, and will be forever.

Amen.