

the kingdom values with the full focus on the eternal home. May God bless us to live in the Spirit. Amen. -Tony

June 24, 2018: Solemnity of Nativity of Saint John the Baptist

Is 49:1-6; Acts 13:22-26; Lk 1:57-66, 80

St John the Baptist as Witness to Jesus

St. John the Baptist was the last and greatest of the Old Testament prophets sent to “prepare the way of the Lord.” Jesus called him the greatest of all the prophets because of his direct involvement in the earthly life and ministry of the Messiah.

St. John the Baptist, Forerunner of Jesus: In St. John the Baptist, the Old Testament meets the New Testament: Before his time, the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed; from his life and to the end of time, the Gospel of Christ is proclaimed.

We remember Saint John the Baptist each time we pray the Holy Rosary, our prayerful meditations on the life of Christ. In the Second Joyful Mystery, the Visitation, the Virgin Mary went in haste to visit her cousin Elizabeth following the Annunciation. John the Baptist leaped in the womb of his mother, Saint Elizabeth, as soon as they were greeted by the Virgin Mary, who then was pregnant with the Child Jesus. We also remember St. John the Baptist in the First Luminous Mystery, as he was the one who baptized Jesus in Jordan river.

St. John the Baptist was from the womb until his death a witness to Jesus Christ as the Messiah and Son of God. At the greeting of the pregnant Mother of God to his mother Elizabeth, he was filled with the Holy Spirit (i.e. baptized in the womb) which caused him to be born without Original Sin.

As the divinely appointed “Precursor” of Jesus Christ, his life was closely intertwined with the earthly life of Jesus. On this feast day of St. John the Baptist we can reflect on how much like Jesus he truly was (www.catholiccompany.com).

Foreword to “Francis Effect”

The episcopal motto of Jorge Mario Bergoglio was *Miserando atque eligendo* (“because he saw him through the eyes of mercy and chose him”). He told me during my interview of 2013: “I always felt it as very true for me”. The motto is taken from the Homilies of St Bede the Venerable. Commenting on the gospel episode of the calling of St Matthew he writes: “Jesus saw a publican and, since he looked at him with a feeling of love, he said: ‘Follow me’.” And he added: “The Latin gerund *miserando* seems to me untranslatable both in Italian and in Spanish. I like to translate it with another gerund: *misericordiando* (‘mercy’).”

For Pope Francis, mercy requires a language that doesn’t exist, it stimulates his linguistic creativity. Here he turns a noun (mercy) into a verb in the form of a gerund (mercying). The Pope loves, in general, verbs more than nouns. The noun refers to the “substance” and has the value of the object, actually, of the thing considered in its fixity. The verb, instead, denotes flow of time, action, dynamism, in a word, experience. Therefore, with this simple linguistic operation Pope Francis wants to say that mercy must lose its fixity of an “act” to become an “action”, that is a “process,” or dynamism. Not “*er’gon*” (an act, a position, a stand) but *energheia*, energy. Process and energy develop in time. Bergoglio intends the “work” of mercy as an element in an open process, defined by two verbs: loving and building. Work of mercy is never an isolated gesture. Mercy expresses an energy that unfolds in time more than space: it starts the process more than being an isolated and defined fact closed in on itself. And time is greater than space because the development of growth unfolds in a process, in the real life.

Obviously, whoever is merciful is “near” to whomever is nearby, is spatially close, touches him or her. But not only that:

it is he or she who makes space in his or her vital tension. The father of the prodigal son is “merciful” because “while the son was still far away [...], he saw him and he felt compassion”, we read in the gospel parable (cfr Lk 15:11-32). It is a nearness that becomes physical, but before he lives all the temporal tension of the real encounter. The forgiveness precedes the repentance. This is real life.

A friend of mine who has received a personal note from Pope Francis—he was an artist with a troubled life—read to me with emotion these phrases: “God searches for us, God awaits us, God finds us ...before we search for Him, before we expect Him, before we find him. This is the mystery of holiness”. In one of his conversations with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, Bergoglio confessed: “I will say that God is to be found while walking, you look for Him, and He lets you search for Him. They are two paths that meet. For our part, we search for Him pushed by an instinct that is born from the heart. And then we meet, there we realize that He was already searching, that he had preceded us”.

The journey of the Church, and each one of us corresponds to the waiting and to the patience of God. We are speaking of processes — that is of time — not only of egregious gestures tied to a moment. Very often Bergoglio has associated God’s mercy to the image of the journey.

This is also the key to grasp Bergoglio’s vision, to understand his thoughts, gestures, acts, initiatives and voyages. Pope Francis is not solely a Pope who accomplishes acts, but also a Pope who opens processes. Life itself is a journey, a process, a living and open process. Francis wants to avoid every form of ideological approach. And only fidelity to history can save us from ideology, not sure, static objectives or abstract ideas. Mercy has nothing of the static nor of the abstract. It is a virtue in the etymological sense of *virtus*, strength of action.

The editors of this wonderful book on Pope Francis have asked about 51 theologians and Church leaders to reflect on one quote from Pope Francis. The idea here is to make the thoughts of Pope

Francis available to the Indian audience by sharing lived experiences and powerful insights on faith, dignity, family, science, truth, openness and the Church. These experiences and insights come from a living experience, from processes, not from ideas.

Reading this book means to remember that we live in a time period of profound changes. It is usual to say, a period of crisis: educational, economic, ecological, moral... It is possible to do an analysis of the situations and describe them, but we know that the man and woman of today live at a time that poses great challenges. Fear of the new means that some are not able to tolerate uncertainty and he or she shuts down in the face of challenges — real or imagined — that any change brings with itself.

The believer, precisely because he or she keeps hope, now more than ever is called to deal with the social and spiritual processes. Those who contributed to this book feel called to deal with these processes. Here they give their witness in the light of the words of Pope Francis. Reading these pages we conclude that we cannot let ourselves be conquered by doubt, disappointment, or powerlessness. Evangelical spiritual discernment seeks to recognize the sign of the Spirit in the human, social and cultural reality; the seeds already planted by his presence in the events, in the sensibilities, in the desires, in the profound tensions of the heart and of the social, cultural and spiritual contexts. It is an interior attitude that pushes us to be open to dialogue, to encounter, to finding God anywhere. He is to be found and not solely in perimeters narrow or however well-defined and fenced. Above all, don’t fear the ambiguity of life and face it with courage, gathering all the good possible, the positive tensions. Christianity is an enriching and creative interpretation (or hermeneutics) of life and reality.

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Francis Effect: Fifty-One Articles on Pope Francis’ Insights.
Kuruvilla Pandikattu & Vadappuram M Jose (eds) Papal Seminary, Pune, 2018, ISBN: 81-88864-35-8; pp. xxvi+234, ₹ 250.

SNIPPETS FROM POPE FRANCIS

Pope Francis has the uncanny art of unpacking the most from the Scripture. His reflections on the verse:

“Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we have observed his star in the East, and have come to worship him” (Mt 2:2).

- The Magi did not set out because they had seen the star, but they saw the star because they had already set out
- They were guided by an inner restlessness. They were open to something new.
- They reflect the image of all those who in their lives have not let their hearts become anesthetized.
- They go to the peripheries, to the frontiers, to places not yet evangelized, to encounter their Lord.
- Nor do they do this out of a sense of superiority, but rather as beggars who cannot ignore the eyes of those who for whom the Good News is still uncharted territory.
- They had to discover that what they sought was not in a palace, but elsewhere, both existentially and geographically.
- Herod is unable to worship because he could not or would not change his own way of looking at things.