

June 24, 2018 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time

Today we celebrate the birthday of St. John the Baptist. Usually when Catholics remember a Saint we celebrate their birth into heaven, rather than their birth here on earth. There are three exceptions, three people for whom we celebrate their births, on Christmas Day we celebrate the birth of Jesus, on September 8th we celebrate the birth of Mary Mother of God, and every year on June 24th we celebrate the birth of St. John the Baptist. Why does the Church give St. John the Baptist the special honor, together with Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, of celebrating his birth?

We honor the birth of John the Baptist because he is *the* prophet, more than any other, who helps us to see the one who was hidden, and to hear the voice that is yet to be heard, to see and hear Jesus.

First, he is the prophet that sees what is hidden. John is the prophet who leapt with joy in his mother's womb when Elizabeth heard the greeting of mother of her Lord. He is the prophet saw Jesus and said, "Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." The prophets of old proclaimed, that a messiah would come John saw that Jesus was the Messiah that was foretold, the Son of God, the Savior of the world. He saw what was hidden.

Secondly, John the Baptist was able to hear the voice that was yet to be spoken. From the moment of the conception of John the Baptist until after his birth, his father, Zechariah was not able to speak. It was only after Zechariah confirmed what Elizabeth had already said, that "his name is John" that his father's mouth was opened and tongue was freed to speak. St. Augustine says, "The silence of Zechariah is nothing but the age of prophecy lying hidden, obscured, as it were, and concealed before the preaching of Christ." John is the voice in the wilderness that announces the coming preaching of Christ. John's voice was silenced by the sword that he would decrease so that Christ could increase. He prepared the way so that the voice of Christ could be heard.

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the River Jordan people could see the Holy Spirit descend upon Jesus in the form of a dove and they could hear the voice of the Father saying, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am will pleased."

It is a gift to hear and to see. I need corrective lenses and a hearing aid to see and hear clearly, I realize how frustrating it is not to see or hear well. As important as it is to see and hear well physically, even more so is it important to do so spiritually. St. John the Baptist is our model to be mature disciples, missionary disciples, see and hear Christ with clarity. It begins with understanding that God sees us and hears us and in turn, God helps us to see and hear each other.

God sees us in our mother's womb even before she knows that we exist. As we heard in the prophet Isaiah today, "from my mother's womb he gave me my name. . . he formed me as his servant from the womb." God sees us in every moment, even in our sleep when we are not aware of our own existence. God hears us even before we can speak, even when we are not able to speak. God sees the heart and listens to our innermost being. When we experience God looking at us and hearing us, we are changed forever. We know that God will always love us and will always forgive us and will never abandon us. He sees us and he hears us through his only Son, Jesus.

Often times we hear the expression, "I see you, I hear you." St. Augustine says that John the Baptist is the border between the Old and New Testaments. The US Bishops, excising their prophetic office, have called for us to see and hear the children separated from their families. In a similar way the "Black Lives Matter" and the "#MeToo" movements have helped people "find their voice" so that others see and hear them. The same is true with the LGBTQ community. I mention this in not to call in question Church teaching on marriage and family life. I would be less than honest as your pastor and would do you a disservice to preach against what our Church holds to be true. In fact, I mention the reality of same-sex attraction to *uphold* Catholic Church teaching, a teaching that many seem to not yet have heard. The Catechism of the Catholic Church in paragraph 2358 says that homosexuals "must be treated with respect, compassion and sensitivity." In other words, Catholics need to see and hear all people, no matter who they are. We might not always agree, but when we see and hear each other then we will grow in respect, compassion and sensitivity. Then we will be better able to see and hear the presence of Jesus himself. That is why St. John the Baptist was born.