

24th June 2018 (The Nativity of St John the Baptist)

Isaiah 49:1-6; Psalm 138(139):1-3,13-15; Acts 13:22-26; Luke 1:57-66,80.

The hand of the Lord was with him!

This Sunday we set aside our reading from the gospel according to Mark to focus and celebrate the feast of the birth of John the Baptist. In his gospel Luke tells us that John's mother, Elizabeth, was a relative of the mother of Jesus. John's importance lies in the fact that he is the precursor of Jesus and leads us to him.

John is considered as the last of the great prophets and the conclusion of the Old Testament; he bridges the gap between the old and the new! In today's gospel reading his parents insist that he should be called John, a name which means God is gracious. Elizabeth and Zachariah had every reason to see God's graciousness in the birth of their son; both were well advanced in years and they were childless, for his parents John was truly a gift from God! For us people of the New Testament, John is also a sign of God's great love and graciousness in Jesus; John is the one who reveals Jesus and points out to him as the lamb of God!

John never speaks about himself but always points towards Jesus who, he says, is greater than himself. John is a great example of humility who comes out to preach and prepare the way for the Lord, but then, when the time comes, he dissolves into the background. John does not even consider himself worthy of undoing Jesus' sandal straps!

In his time John was a very popular preacher. The gospels tell that many of his contemporaries used to gather around him to listen to his preaching and to be baptised in the river Jordan, as a sign of their repentance. John could have very easily built a church around himself and kept the crowds around him. Instead he encouraged his own disciples to follow Jesus, the lamb God was going to offer in sacrifice!

Every call is closely linked to a mission. Like John the Baptist we too are called, and God is very gracious to us. How do we show our appreciation to God's graciousness in our life? How thankful are we to God for his many gifts? John set out on his mission to prepare the way for the Lord. He first prepared himself by going out into the desert and then pointed out Jesus. Like John we too are called and invited to be prophets in our world today. How do I prepare myself? Pope Francis continuously invites us to listen to God's word in our life and then to point towards Jesus. We can do this simply in our homes and in communities of friends by being witnesses to Jesus.

At his circumcision the relatives of John mused: 'What will this child turn out to be?' and indeed, since he followed God's voice in him he became a great prophet and 'the hand of the Lord was with him.' The hand of God is with us also as we are called to be prophets in our world today.

Fr Mario