

Baptism B 2021 SML
MK 1:7-11

If John the Baptist were to show up at St. Mary of the Lakes, if John the Baptist were to show up in Washington DC, this past week, wearing clothes and eating the same fare you would find on “Survivor,” what would his message be and what would be our response?

The Baptism of our Blessed Lord, whose feast we celebrate this morning, is one of very few events in the life of Jesus that is recorded in all four Gospel accounts. It is found in the Gospel of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Scripture scholars use the theory of multiple attestation to say the more times a story or a saying appears in the Gospel, the greater the chance the story really happened, or Jesus really said it. The fact that all four gospel accounts record the event practically word for word tells us that, at Jesus’ Baptism, the following is virtually certain:

1. Jesus was baptized by John
2. Jesus was baptized in the River Jordan
3. The voice of God the Father was heard,
4. and the Holy Spirit was seen in the form of a dove.

It is the only time in the Gospel when all three persons of the Trinity were present to the senses at the same time:

- ✓ God the Father was heard,
- ✓ God the Son and God the Holy Spirit were seen.

What would you give to be knee high in the waters of the River Jordan, and experience all that John the Baptist and his followers saw and heard that fateful day:

1. to hear God's voice,
2. to behold God's Son,
3. to see God's Spirit.

While knee high in the River Jordan, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit validating the words and work of John the Baptist, I would have a chill up my spine from the raw honesty of it all, because without the Blessed Trinity validating John the Baptist, I would have crossed off John the Baptist as "a nutjob."

The Baptism of Our Blessed Lord opened the doors to the public life of Jesus. But before the people heard the voice of the Messiah, they heard the voice of a prophet one more time. The news went all through the country that in the desert a preacher had appeared. He had spent years wandering the desert beside the lonely shores of the Dead Sea, clad in a hair cloak and leather, and eating locusts and wild honey. Now, jut

and aside, but I always thought when it says John ate locusts, he was eating the bug. He wasn't. He was eating the locust buds off of locust trees. I learned that while we were on pilgrimage in the Holy Land. Regardless, One look at John the Baptist and you'd conclude, "That guy's a nut job."

But John knew life outside of the desert well. He knew all the evils of his time:

- ✓ He knew the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who put the heavy load of many, many interpretations of the Law on the backs of other men, but did not carry the load themselves
- ✓ He knew the laziness of the Sadducees, whose "back to the basics," return to the *Torah* was not motivated by holiness, but on seeking a life of comfort and self indulgence
- ✓ He knew the corruption of the masses, who sold the just man for silver, and a poor man for a pair of sandals.

John the Baptist did not preach like the mumblers who spoke in the synagogues. He did not preach like the smooth-tongued teachers in Jerusalem. He preached like a rude, strong man, speaking from the heart to the heart, with the authority of one who was sure of his inspiration. He spoke with a keen sense to searching the heart, shaking the conscience, and without fear, laid bare the sins of every person. He told it like it was.

We are so good at justifying our sins, thinking there is no limit to what we can do, no limit to hubris:

- ✓ Yeah, well it's true I haven't been completely faithful to my wife, but she doesn't meet all my needs

Ask Herod and Herodias how far they got with John the Baptist on that line of thinking? John the Baptist called them on the carpet and it cost him his head.

The events of this past week were mentioned by every person who came to me for confession yesterday save one. Leading the nation in prayer using a word that doesn't exist is hubris. Hijack the Capitol is grossly hubris. Hijacking the Capitol is no different than hijacking any election. And if the election was hijacked, two wrongs never make a right. Hijackers on the left are as guilty as hijackers on the right. God was not pleased with the events in Washington this past week, not pleased at all.

I've preached about everyone having a "this," whatever "this" is. Those of us who are upset, and I imagine that would be most of the nation, have the events of this past week as one of their "this."

To cite another Gospel involving water, not the River Jordan, but the walking of Peter on the Sea of Galilee, we

need to keep our eyes on Jesus, who has “this.” When we look to the waves on the radical left or the wakes on the radical right, we sink like Peter. But when we keep our eyes on the Lord, we can walk over the water, we can walk over “this.” Thank God we are people of faith who have this option. People without faith do not have this option, and right now, that’s the only option I can think of.

Along with John telling it like it was, John had yet another message that was so very exciting. He told them the Messiah is at hand, the Messiah is come and you people are completely unprepared. Don’t give me the line that you are descendants of Abraham, because God could make descendants of Abraham from stones. (MT 3:9) Being a descendant of Abraham is not going to admit you to the Kingdom. What’s going to admit you to the Kingdom of righteousness and holiness is doing what is right and what is holy, and not what is grossly hubris.

So some came to the River Jordan with fear and hope and submitted to Baptism.

Others came to the River Jordan and were irritated by the exposure of their sins and so they turned away in anger.

If we were to listen to John the Baptist, a rude, strong man, speaking from the heart to the heart, with the authority of

one who was sure of his inspiration; if we listened to John who spoke with a keen sense to searching the heart, shaking the conscience, and without fear, lying bare the sins of every congregant, what would he say about all the players in Washington, DC, politicians and citizens alike? What would he say about you, what would he say about me, and what would he say about them?

Would you approach the Baptist with fear and hope and submit to Baptism? Would I be irritated by the exposure of my sins and turn away in anger? Would they stress the fact that they were already baptized? Could they show him their baptismal garment to prove it, and if they did, how clean would it be?

If John the Baptist were to show up at St. Mary of the Lakes, what would his message be? I would hope his raw and honest message would be:

Well, I don't see the hypocrisy of the Pharisees
And I don't see the lethargy of the Saducees
And I don't see the corruption of the masses . . .
And I don't see the hubris of this past week.

I'd also hope John the Baptist would defer to God the Father, who would paraphrase what He said that glorious day

when Our Blessed Lord was baptized in the Jordan. “This is my beloved St. Mary of the Lakes Parish, with whom I am well pleased.” And if God the Father could not say these words, either here at St. Mary of the Lakes or in Washington, DC, what would we need to change so that He could?