

“Decrease the Ego to Increase the Light of Christ in the World”

Homily for the Monthly Pro-Life Mass

Saturday after Epiphany

St. Mary’s Cathedral, January 9, 2021

Introduction

We are now drawing toward the end of the Christmas season, the last day being tomorrow, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. So we hear on the second to the last day of the season again from St. John the Baptist – he of course is the one who baptized Our Lord. This figure of John the Baptist keeps recurring throughout the Advent and Christmas cycle.

John first figures prominently in the middle of the Advent season: he is the one who heralds the coming of the Lord. Advent is a time the Church reminds us to be always alert, on the lookout for the Lord’s coming. John is the one who reminds us of that. And then in the last week of Advent, as we are leading up to Christmas, we hear about the infancy narratives – “narratives” in the plural, because we hear not only the one of Our Lord but also the narrative of the announcement and birth of St. John the Baptist.

St. John the Baptist

Now, as we approach the end of the Christmas season, John the Baptist figures prominently once again. He is indeed a great model of discipleship, as is of course Our Lady, who obviously also figures prominently at this time of the year, but more toward the end of Advent and throughout the Christmas season. But John, too, is a great model of discipleship for us, expressed especially by his motto that we heard at the end of this Gospel passage today: “He must increase; I must decrease.”

This accounts for the dates of the celebrations of the births of Our Lord and of his forerunner, John. We celebrate the Birth of Our Lord at this time of the year when the light begins to increase. At the winter solstice, the darkness is at its maximum, and then it begins to retreat as the light increases. We celebrate the Birth of St. John shortly after the summer solstice, when the light is at its greatest but then begins to decrease. He knows that he must decrease for others to be brought to the Lord.

It does indeed seem that there is increasing darkness in our world today – darkness, of course, being a metaphor for sin, for ignorance and, in particular, for death. This is the sin of which St. John (Apostle and Evangelist) speaks in the first reading, where we heard from his First Letter, where he speaks about “deadly” sin. There is, he says, sin that is deadly, that is, a sin unto death. Some sins do not lead to death in and of themselves, but weaken the life of God in us, take us away from God, but do not kill the life of God in us. Sin unto death does.

We see this culture of death all around us. Thank you for being here today. Thank you for being a light in the midst of this darkness, a light being a witness to the sanctity of human life. Thank you for being advocates. And as we would say, and need to be nowadays, *activists* for the culture of life.

The Power of Prayer

I am grateful that you have come together today for the celebration of this Mass and for the procession to the clinic and your commitment to doing this and praying the rosary in front of the clinic every first Saturday of the month. Given the particular period of holidays and all that, we start out with the second Saturday this first month of the year, but then we will continue on

the first Saturday of the month, in response to Our Lady's request of us to honor her Immaculate Heart with Mass on the first Saturday of the month.

We need to tap into this power of prayer, especially because the prince of darkness, that is to say, the prince of death, is literally right at our doorstep. We need to ramp up the power of prayer. I would hope we can do this, even beyond the first Saturday of the month to every Saturday and even throughout the week, if possible. We need the power of prayer and fasting to defeat the powers of darkness so that this darkness might not continue to increase but might decrease so that Our Lord might increase. He is the one who is the Giver of Life, who gives us his light and goodness.

This happens when we follow that example of St. John the Baptist, our model of discipleship. "He must increase; I must decrease." We must decrease in the sense of our egos. Our egos must decrease. We must bring ourselves low so that God's power might grow in us. Notice what else St. John the Baptist says about himself in this passage from St. John the Apostle's Gospel: "The one who has the bride is the bridegroom; the best man who stands and listens for him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice." "Best man." The word here, literally, is "friend." The best man is the friend of the Bridegroom. When we are friends of the Bridegroom, then we are angels of light and of his life in the world.

Conclusion

The sign that we are his friends is when we rejoice at his voice, not at all of those other competing voices that seek to take us down a path of destruction, of darkness, and ultimately of death. There is a lot of competition in the world today, but we rejoice at the voice of the Bridegroom. We can recognize his voice. That is the voice that gives us joy and that we want to follow. This shows that we are friends of the Bridegroom. He, the Bridegroom, is our light. He is our life. May we be his friends, bringing his light, life and love into this world of darkness and gloom.