

“Take the WHEEL”



**By Very Reverend Glenn Jones, Vicar General,
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What a world. We constantly must ask: “Is this politician/celebrity/person being truthful or not? Or rather ... is he simply seeking to further his own interests at the expense of others?” It’s anyone’s guess. After all, we are deluged daily by the deceitful—scamming phone calls (“Let that warranty run out already!”), e-mails (“Boy, those foreign princes sure are generous!”), faked pictures and documents on unsocial media, etc. Sigh.

Now, we Catholics remember John the Baptist especially as we close the Christmas season. The Gospels tells us that John was quite the popular guy ... even to the point of having to deny repeatedly that he was the promised Messiah/Christ as so many thought he might be. John’s (the apostle/evangelist) Gospel emphasizes strongly that John declared adamantly that he knew he was *not* the Christ.

Hmmm ... integrity. Humility. Honesty. Even in the face of temptation to abuse such an opportunity for his own advantage and glory. Yet John stands strong in doing the right ... his character showing forth ever more brightly.

Now John was of priestly lineage, so he came from an honored class of the Jewish society. Even so, he rejected self-glorification and ventured out to live very simply in the desert. He knew that one’s character and godliness did not reside in pedigree, but rather in what one does: “...do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham...every

tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:9-10).

Jesus Himself would echo this sentiment in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) when He affirms: “*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and DOES them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came...but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does NOT do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came...and it fell; and great was the fall of it.*” (Matthew 7:24-27) Such themes are present throughout both Old and New Testaments.

Understanding this, John refused to water down God’s teaching in order to conform to worldly standards. And yet, ironically, he became popular for that very reason: “*Then went out to him Jerusalem and all Judea and all the region about the Jordan...*” (Matthew 3:5) This is the thirst and attraction that sincere people have for truth.

And, then ... Truth Himself shows up.

Jesus came to the Jordan River where John was teaching and performing his symbolic washing (baptism) of those who wanted to follow God more ardently. But rather than seek to maintain the fame that he had acquired, John—in most admirable humility—“stays real”, and does not hesitate to relinquish “the higher place”. For here before him, John knows, stands

the greater—the one John himself realized as He *“...whose sandal I am not worthy to untie.”* (John 1:27), even denouncing his own self-perceived unworthiness to Jesus: *“I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?”* (Matthew 3:14). John also tells his own disciples: *“You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, I am not the Christ...He must increase, but I must decrease.”* (John 3:28-30) John bows in faith and trust to the plan to God, and Jesus’ public ministry begins. Jesus “takes the wheel”.

We Christians know that’s always the best of plans: trusting in God ... trusting in Christ. Men and women are often taken aback by events and troubles in this life when all seems to be outside of our control. And yet ... the Christian—like John the Baptist—trusts in the plan of God. Regardless of what difficulty, trial or even evil from others that one endures, God does not abandon, as He assures us via that beautiful scripture: *“Can a mother forget her infant, be without tenderness for the child of her womb? Even should she forget, I will never forget you.”* (Isaiah 49:15) And so, in those inevitable storms of life, we know that Christ ever turns to us as He calms the seas: *“Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid.”* (Matthew 14:27)

One might be tempted to retort with examples of the evils of this world as “proofs” against God. Yes, evil exists; “why” is the incompletely answered question. And yet ... God Himself—Jesus—endured some of the greatest evils of all: hatred, betrayal by a dear companion, false condemnation, witnessing His own mother’s sorrow at the torture of an only child, scourging, crucifixion, death. Yet we are wholly ill-equipped to understand all the rhyme and reason of God’s plan, but we trust it nonetheless, knowing that without the dark in the overall masterpiece, the lighter would not shine as brightly.

The singer Carrie Underwood has a song: “Jesus, Take the Wheel”—a song of hope and trust in hopeless moments ... surrendering to God with trust in His love and care. She sings:

*It'd been a long hard year
She had a lot on her mind, and she didn't pay attention
She was going way too fast...*

Sounds a lot like our lives, huh? In every life there are those moments when all seems out of our hands. That’s when it’s good to remember John the Baptist in his simplicity and determination to do the good ... to observe Truth, to live Truth. To live a life in accord with what Jesus has taught—love of God, love of neighbor. What greater truths can there be? Yet ... if we’re going to let Jesus drive, we must get in the car with Him. Only then can we pray:

*Jesus, take the wheel
Take it from my hands
'Cause I can't do this on my own
I'm letting go
So give me one more chance
And save me from this road I'm on.*

Jesus, take the wheel... .

