

## Fr Dispin John – Homily 1<sup>st</sup> Sun Advent 29/11/2020 St John's Mitcham

At the beginning of the gospel of Mark today, we are introduced to two great figures that stand at the beginning of the Christian faith, Jesus and John the Baptist. All four evangelists witness to the truth that you cannot tell the story of Jesus without first speaking of John the Baptist. He's a towering figure who introduces the adult Jesus into the community. Interestingly, John was a son of a priest, Zachariah. Zachariah was a priest in the temple. But John, being the son of a priest, chooses not to be part of the temple cult. He doesn't even go near Jerusalem, the city where everything happens, but he rather chooses a very different spot to begin his ministry of repentance, of bringing people back to God, to prepare them for something ground breaking. So he chooses the Jordan on the far side of Jordan.

Now, when the people, who in the journey of Exodus from Egypt to the promised land, after the death of Moses, the people are led to enter into the promised land and they probably crossed this part of the Jordan to come into the promised land. From exodus they now cross over the river of Jordan to come into the promised land. John the Baptist is choosing that spot to bring people to cross over from their sinfulness, into the forgiveness of God. John was given a mission to preach the coming of the good news. Now, when John introduces Jesus, he calls the people to participate, to acknowledge, to know that something new is happening. The good news he's broken.

The people that flocked to John are either converted by that message of repentance or are some curious onlookers. But when they reach the spot, they realize and recognize there is something deeply spiritual happening in this space. So moved by the message and by their own sinfulness, they then take the dip. They go, repent and then get baptized in the river Jordan. John the Baptist was someone who recognizes Jesus, recognizes his mission and then exits the scene. Because after the death of John the Baptist later in the scene beheaded by Herod, we don't hear of him. He comes, does his mission and then exits. The purpose of this energetic renewal movement is to prepare for the one who is to come. That was the mission.

And Jesus later on acknowledges this greatness of John the Baptist, by saying there is no one born of a woman greater than John the Baptist. As John recognizes Jesus's goodness, Jesus recognizes his greatness too. John's way is a challenge to all of us. As we go through this Advent journey, maybe it is good to take an inward journey first of all. The need for God's forgiveness and repentance from our side, and then to recognize the greatness in others, without feeling threatened about the value of our own contribution. By recognizing others and their goodness and their talents, it doesn't mean we diminish. In fact, we, like John the Baptist, will become great. If only we had the courage and the intuitiveness to recognize the greatness of others. So as the relationship between John and Jesus teaches us the generosity in recognizing the goodness of others can help them call out the good that is in ourselves too.

When that happens, there are no losers. The first purpose of Jesus's coming is that we become part of God's life. We are witness and no losers. So a good thing, maybe in this time of Advent, is, apart from setting up times for prayer, reflection and maybe saving us from an overdose of social messages and the media, maybe we should just save ourselves a little bit of our time with Jesus. And while doing that, I think it may be worth reflecting, when was the last time you genuinely appreciated someone with the intention of helping them grow? When was the last time you patted someone on the shoulder to encourage and say, I am with you? When was the last time you extended a helping hand to someone to pick them up when life was tough? And when was the last time you let someone grow despite your need to boost your own ego? When was the last time you let go so that let others be. Well, God came down, letting everything go, so that we can be lifted up. Maybe it is time to do the same for others.