

“He must increase, I must decrease” (Jn 3:30). John the Baptist was a man of great discipline living very simply in the desert. It is in his very nature to do everything possible to leave as small a footprint as possible in order to point the way to Jesus. He performed no miracles, but his message of repentance struck a chord. His listeners are spiritually moved to seek a baptism of repentance and change their ways. Even Herod, who made a martyr of John the Baptist, was attracted to the truth he preached.

John the Baptist attracted many followers. They recognized his holiness and wanted to follow in his footsteps. There is a danger that others will look up to him putting him on a pedestal and making him a false idol. When a person's ego becomes inflated, they enjoy all of the attention and can seek out others for their adulation and praise. But John the Baptist is a humble man and therefore rightly notes that he must decrease allowing Jesus to become better known.

His example of humility is worth following. We are all called to share in the mission of spreading the good news but we must always remember it is the good news of Jesus Christ. It is not about us. John the Baptist shows wisdom in recognizing that he could draw attention away from Jesus. This is counter to his mission. And so, he does everything he can to point to the Messiah and to draw less attention to himself.

Jesus is another role model in humility. Jesus resists the temptation of the devil, showing us that with a deep interior prayer life, we too can grow in spiritual progress and make headway in saying yes to God and no to temptation. One may argue that Jesus' divine nature has decreased to help us understand the great gift of our own human nature.

If we think beyond this life to the next, we know that we who are mere humans are offered a share in the divine life. In the life to come, we will increase in holiness as God helps us to let go of the attachments to this world and enter into his presence where the physical limitations of this world will fall to the wayside.

But one does not enter heaven by presuming too much. Recall the example of Jesus in washing the feet of the Apostles. He knelt down to wash their feet and reminded them that they too must be servants first. “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (Jn 13:14-15).

Jesus' mission is one of helping us to be less reliant on ourselves and more reliant on God. In the Garden of Gethsemane when he cedes his own will to that of the Father, he is showing us how we must decrease in order to increase our own willingness to follow God's ways and to do the will of the Father.

Jesus is the Lamb of God who is both human and divine. He is quite humble himself and his divine nature is not often apparent. In his preaching and his teaching, he points us to the Father and to the Holy Spirit. When the disciples want to hold on to the risen Jesus, he has to help them understand that he must depart so the Holy Spirit may come.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus demonstrate great humility and give us examples of how we should live our lives as disciples of Christ. “He must increase, I must decrease.”