

Week 14: December 8, 2010
THE 611
Joseph Hollcraft M.A.

XXVII. St. John the Baptist was one of the most enigmatic figures in salvation history. Understanding his role as a prophet will help us begin to understand the mission of the person of John. After briefly recalling the nature and function of a prophet, we will then follow up with a look at the Visitation, his message at the River Jordan, and the Baptism of Jesus to have a more whole understanding of his role as a bridge between the Old Covenant and New Covenant.

1. Recall, the Israelite prophet is one who received a divine call to be a messenger and interpreter of the Word of God. The word that came to the prophet compelled him to speak. Speaking as a “mouthpiece for God”, the prophet is also the conscience of a community and the conscience of a nation. One of the primary roles was to alert everyone that "Things are going the wrong way" and/or "We're in danger. We have to change. We have to be ready to protect ourselves." The prophet is the one who sees farther, perhaps, than others, and the one who sees implications in what is going on (Rosica)
 - a. The prophet shared, at times, God's anger, compassion, sorrow, disappointment, revulsion, sensitivity for people, and God's seriousness. They shared God's feelings about the concrete events of their time. This is the type of prophet that John the Baptist was. He didn't mince words. He got right to the point and said what needed to be said.
2. In two separate paragraphs the Catechism highlights who the Baptist was in his role as the prophet of prophets. The CCC states: “*St. John the Baptist is the Lord's immediate precursor or forerunner, sent to prepare his way (cf. Mt.3:3) "Prophet of the Most High", John surpasses all the prophets, of whom he is the last (cf. Lk.1:76). He inaugurates the Gospel, already from his mother's womb welcomes the coming of Christ, and rejoices in being "the friend of the bridegroom", whom he points out as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (cf. Jn.1:29). Going before Jesus "in the spirit and power of Elijah", John bears witness to Christ in his preaching, by his Baptism of conversion, and through his martyrdom (cf. Lk.1:17).*”
 - a. Christ begins his public ministry after he has been baptized by the Baptist in the River Jordan (cf. 1223).
3. As the CCC highlights, the Baptist from the womb announces the coming of Christ (Mary as Ark of the New Covenant). This Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception, it is fitting to tie together the second joyful mystery to the first; the Visitation to the Annunciation, so as to better understand the way in which the Baptist inaugurates Christ's ministry. Let us first consider God's delicate touch in the communion of Mary and Elizabeth.
 - a. In the figure of Elizabeth, we have Mary's companion in the long and arduous journey. Mary has with her someone who knows what she is going through (God's providential care). The Annunciation and Visitation are inextricably bound by women who were to bear the weight of salvation history (each magnificent—Mary and Zechariah—is a hymn to this reality...a recital of God's covenant love).
 - i. The Baptist leaping in the womb confirms what Mary would have known so vividly in her faith. The prophetic spirit inside of Elizabeth brings about a deeper sense of the Spirit working in communion of persons...where two or more are gathered in my name there am I in their midst!!!
 1. In this greeting, you have an inter-uterine consecration.

- b. Lk.1:41: *“leaping in the womb”*. The Greek word for leaping is *skirtao*, which is the same term used in the Greek OT when Rebekah’s experience signaled the preeminence of Jacob over Esau (cf. Gn. 25:22-23) (Ig. Commentary).
 - c. In addition to these pieces regarding the Visitation, we have the etymology behind the parents of St. John the Baptist.
 - i. Zechariah: means *“God remembers.”*
 - ii. Elizabeth means *“God has sworn.”*
4. Message at the River Jordan. Before we engage some of the words that alert us to John as the bridge between the OC and NC, let us first consider his existential presence, which communicates his awareness of what is at the heart of the new law—Spiritual poverty!
- a. The baptizer defined his humanity in terms of its limitations. When the time had come, John led his own disciples to Jesus and indicated to them the Messiah, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus' own testimony to John makes the Baptizer the greatest of all Israelite heroes (cf. Mt.11:7-19; Lk. 7:24-35).
 - b. John’s considered himself to be less than a slave to Jesus: *“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire”* (Matthew 3:11).
 - i. In the Baptist’s humility, he opposes the four P’s of the adversary: Pride, Power, Pleasure, and Prestige with an austere heart...the resounding presence of humility!
 - ii. **Read the San Hedrin** questioning the Baptist. Consider the titles that were ready to be given unto him from the members of the San Hedrin. Not only does he deny these titles of honor and dignity, but rather with perfect humility he puts himself at the bottom of the totem pole (slave).
 - 1. 1 Cor.13: *“he confessed and did not deny.”* The Hebrew uses a parallel term for confess and to not deny that has the connotation of marveling in God. We confess and deny at the same time. This statement also brings to light another truth: to confess is to not deny! We accuse ourselves and at the same time excuse ourselves (Desales).
 - 2. The more the inquisitors pursue the Baptist, the more he withdraws! I am only a voice, an exhale that utters sounds and then disappears (Desales).
 - c. Repentance...OT/NT...(cf. **word of the week on repentance**).
 - i. The Baptist had the duty to preach...as they did 2000 years ago, we have the duty to listen and act. What are reasons that we do not respond to the Word of God:
 - 1. Complacency-putting it off until tomorrow.
 - 2. Consumption of material and the absence of digesting it well.
 - ii. Repentant heart leads to a life of virtue. The crowds came to John and asked him, "What then shall we do?" Once again, the Baptist didn't mince words. He got right to the point and said what needed to be said. He advised no one to leave the world they are in, however ambiguous it may be.
 - 1. Rather he told those with two coats to share one with those who had none. Likewise those with an abundance of food were to share with the hungry. What were people to do to prepare for the imminent coming of the Messiah? To be generous, just, honest, grateful and compassionate (Luke 3:10-14).

- d. Kingdom of God: OT/NT...(cf. *word of the week on Kingdom*).
 - e. John's own Annunciation of the Christ: The Lamb of God: OT/NT. Here highlight how John strategically deploys this title to emerge as a real motif to the mission of Christ—John announces!
 - i. Compare and contrast Jn.19 with Ex.12
5. Baptism of Jesus. Christ identifies with man in all things. Our Baptism is an immersion into Christi's Baptism (cf. CCC, 536). The Baptism of Repentance verses the Sacrament of Baptism.
- a. Righteousness: OT/NT.
 - b. Heavens opened: Schizo (Gk.): meaning, "tear open" (cf. is.64:1). This was the same Greek used when the temple veil was town in two (cf.Mk.15:38). The indwelling of the life of the Trinity.
 - i. Like that of Noah, the dove inaugurates a new beginning-water saves!!!