

Maybe today's Baptism of the Lord can kickoff a baptism of our nation and help to move us in a new direction. I'll start with a full disclosure, I'm a big fan of St. John the Baptist and he plays a big role in the baptism of Jesus which we celebrate today. John's life is a model of authentic Christian living, but he is the ultimate man on a mission. In other words, "He's the man!" Here are a few important facts about John that can lead us to become better Christians.

From his birth he was chosen to be the herald of Christ, a word which means one who announces the coming of a new king. In the Gospel of Mark we read, "Behold, I am sending my messenger ahead of you; he will prepare your way. A voice of one crying out in the desert: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths.'" This was John's calling. He announces Jesus who fulfills the prophesy from today's first reading, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased."

John is also a man of great obedience. His father was from the priestly class and John was expected to follow in his father's footsteps, which means he would he would have lived a comfortable life as a priest in a synagogue. But the Holy Spirit redirected his life and as the gospel of Luke says, "The child continued to grow and to become strong in spirit, and he lived in the deserts until the day of his public appearance to Israel." John grew close to God living a simple existence, isolated from the distractions of secular society.

John the Baptist was also a picture of authenticity. He came out of the desert after 10 or 15 years, and rather than trying to fit in (like going shopping for clothes) he just continued to live his simple life. "John was clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist. He fed on locusts and wild honey." He was eccentric, yet he was wildly popular. This is from today's gospel, "People of the whole Judean countryside and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the Jordan River as they acknowledged their sins." He crossed the spectrum from the rural towns to the big cities with his message of repentance.

Repentance is translated in Greek as metanoia, 'to think differently after'. Metanoia reflects a "change of mind and heart" or a "change of consciousness". People became more conscious of the destructive impact of their sins and changed their way of life because of John's teaching. How does

this rugged man from the desert make such a profound change in the lives of so many people?

I think his commitment to his faith turned people hearts around. He walked the walk and lived the life. He also offered a path forward, a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. A clean start for sinners and the coming of the messiah who would sacrifice himself for all our sins.

On the day of the baptism of the Lord, John sees Jesus and says, "Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." These are words that would change the world forever. These words we say today and at every mass.

And after the baptism, the heavens are torn open and the Spirit, like a dove, descends upon Jesus. And a voice coming from the heavens says, 'You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.'" This is God's seal that authenticates Jesus and validates John's life work, as the herald of the messiah.

In summary, John is obedient in answering the call, living the life carved out by God and walking the walk of Christian living. John is authentic, living a life of devotion to God and delivering the message of Christ from his heart with great integrity. And finally John is committed in his prayer life with the Father and in his mission to spread the word about Jesus.

Don't you just want to go back in time and meet John the Baptist? I would talk to him about prayer and what it was like getting to know God in the desert. I would want to hear him cry out, "Repent! For the Kingdom of God is at hand!"

Maybe that would be enough to motivate me to take the next step in my faith walk... As a deacon I made a vow that's always reminded me of St. John the Baptist. The bishop extended the book of the gospels and said,

"Receive the Gospel of Christ whose herald you have become. Believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach." This is the lifetime journey of faith we ALL aspire to. So, let us take a moment to pray to St. John the Baptist who inspires us to follow our calling to serve the Lord.

Dear St. John the Baptist, we thank you for your example of obedience, authenticity and commitment. We thank you for being a herald for our savior and preparing the way for His ministry in this world. Continue to inspire us to be authentic Christians and prepare the way for His coming into our hearts and the hearts and minds of our world that so desperately need His peace. Amen.

A Message from the Bishop

“On this tragic day on which we have witnessed a violent and insurrectionist assault upon the heart of our democracy, we must dedicate ourselves to completely transforming our political and cultural life so as to emphasize unity over division, dialogue over confrontation, and character over political and personal gain. We are in the midst of a profoundly spiritual crisis in our country, and we must pray that God will walk with us as we seek to reclaim the dreams and aspirations of the generations of Americans.” Bishop Robert McElroy