



Advent meditation 21 by Father Robbie Low

ADVENT XXI

JOHN THE BAPTIST

Two things always strike me about this great servant of God whose ministry forms the hinge between the Testaments. The first is his 'tone'. Brought up in an establishment 'vicarage', his father on the rota of the Temple, you might think he would be more polite. On the contrary, John's language is urgent, uncompromising – even brutal. Our introduction to him is welcoming the crowds to the Jordan bank with the coruscating greeting, 'YOU BROOD OF VIPERS, WHAT MADE YOU FLEE FROM THE WRATH TO COME?' Imagine the average parish priest welcoming a never attending baptism family in this manner! The bishop would be swift, I suspect, to send the 'errant' PP on an unscheduled sabbatical until the obvious mental health issues were resolved. (Many years ago, in my Anglican days, we ran a highly successful orthodox magazine in which we reported the regular follies, heresies, dishonesties and corruption of the Anglican establishment. It was always laced with humour. Unable to contradict the facts we presented, we were regularly summoned by bishops who would complain about the 'tone'. We would refer them to John.) John's 'tone', of course, saw the state take the ultimate sanction against him. John, being the last of the prophets and the Forerunner, understood the urgency of the time. He was not going to engage in an ongoing dialogue with wickedness – see

the American Church's failure to denounce the U.S. President and his crew for claiming to be a Catholic while loudly espousing and remorselessly pursuing the mass murder of the unborn. John speaks truth to power and the cost is martyrdom. It was ever thus.

The second thing that always strikes me is his amazing humility. He is the known- about miracle child. Son of the vicarage, born in a blaze of publicity, child of barren parents, attended by angels, prophesied to lead his people back to God. And yet he does not claim what is not his. He defers to Jesus, the anonymous cousin from a two-bit northern town, born in scandal, child of exile, dubious parentage etc etc

John could have seized the glory for himself. He stands on the banks of the Jordan, Israel at his feet, the nation waiting on his every word, waiting for him to claim the long awaited, longed for Messiahship. It is within his grasp. The temptation must have been huge. But he sticks to the truth. He points to Jesus. He subjects himself to his 'junior' partner. He proclaims Jesus as the Lamb of the Passover, the sacrifice of the liberation of his people. In that memorable phrase of humility and self-denial and recognition, John says simply: 'He must wax and I must wane'. And that is the way of all prophets and evangelists.....to call the people to repentance, to fearlessly speak the truth, to point to Jesus as the Saviour and to make sure everything is to His glory – not to ours.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISE: Remember, give thanks and pray for the souls of those who pointed you to Jesus and have gone before

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