

Follow our patron in his humility
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

The feast of St. John the Baptist is a big feast for our eparchy. As you know, St. John the Forerunner is our patron saint.

The Gospel reading today tells us about the beginning of the Forerunner's life. We could say that the events surrounding his conception and birth were a little bit strange. They also reflected the signs and traditions in the Old Testament, in which unbelievers were punished.

John's father, Zechariah, a priest, had asked for signs from heaven after the Archangel Gabriel announced to him that his wife, believed to have been barren, would give birth in her old age. In response, the angel told him that he would be punished because his faith was weak.

Later in the New Testament, we do not read about God punishing people due to their weak faith, though Jesus warns his listeners about the eternal punishment of hell.

Still, if our faith is weak, then it is a clear sign that we are not doing well in the Christian life.

As Christians, we know the mission of John the Baptist. We know he was not the Messiah, though many Jewish people asked him, "Are you the Messiah?" He would always deny this and tell them that the Messiah was coming.

When Jesus came to the River Jordan to be baptized by John, the Forerunner recognized Jesus as the Messiah, declaring, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.' I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel" (Jn 1:29-31).

This was the very simple life of John the Baptist. He was so humble — so great, but also so humble — that all he did was prepare the way for Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we want to be the center of attention. It's normal. Human beings are interested in focusing attention on themselves. But John the Baptist is a good example for us on how not to concentrate too much on ourselves. Brothers and sisters, Jesus Christ is more important; we must concentrate our lives on him.

We are invited on this feast to ask God that we, too, may be forerunners of Jesus in our surroundings, in our families. Maybe the witness we give with our lives could prepare the way for Jesus in the lives of the people who are close to us, our friends or our relatives, who are not believers in Jesus. Perhaps there are people who have neglected their faith, who don't attend Divine Liturgy on Sundays. Maybe they don't pray anymore or receive the sacrament of confession anymore. And maybe you are invited by Jesus to be the one who will prepare the way for him in their lives. We do not know God's plans, but we could ask him: "Jesus, if you want, we will be instruments for you. We are available, we are open."

You know, the availability of our hearts for God is very important. It is enough for God to see our availability, our preparedness, the openness of our hearts. God has no need for our money or for our talents. God needs us, our hearts.

So, we are celebrating today, a big feast for our eparchy, our cathedral and our parish. May St. John the Baptist be for us a good example of humility, and also an example of how to proceed to find and fight for the truth and for what is right in our lives, because often what is right and true is put outside. Everything is permitted today, and sometimes we do not know how to proceed. May we turn to St. John the Baptist, patron of our eparchy, as a good example for our Christian life.

This column is based on a homily Bishop Lach gave on the feast of St. John the Baptist, June 24, at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, on the occasion of the parish's 120th anniversary.

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