WE NEED MORE JOHNS THE BAPTIST

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Dear faithful, during Advent the Holy Church sets before our eyes again and again the figure of Saint John the Baptist, the forerunner of Christ. Saint Augustine wrote: *Mirare Joannem quantum potes; Christo proficit quod miraris* – admire John as much as you can, but this admiration is to the glory of Christ, for there is no doubt that every work is the glory of him who made that work. For this reason the honour that the Church pays to the holy angels has as its first aim to give honour to him who is their Creator and Saviour, whose grace has brought the soul to holiness.

Dear faithful, a whole series of miraculous events was connected with Saint John the Baptist, which showed that he had been chosen by God for a special role in the history of salvation. He was conceived by Saint Elizabeth when she was already advanced in years. His birth was announced to his father, Saint Zachary, by an angel. Still in his mother's womb, when the Most Holy Mother, with child, came to visit Saint Elizabeth, he was cleansed of original sin.

It is no wonder, then, that the activity of Saint John, the baptism of penance which he preached by the Jordan, attracted crowds of people. Crowds of people intrigued, curious, asking themselves who this man was, whether he might perhaps be the Messiah who was awaited. And today the Pharisees come to Saint John the Baptist and ask him point-blank: "Are you the Christ, Elijah, the prophet?"

Considering the great respect and the great interest which his person aroused among the Jews, he certainly stood before a great temptation. Someone else might have wavered, might have yielded to the desire for dominion, for earthly glory, for fame, for someone else's glory. This temptation of human recognition might have drawn him away from the vocation entrusted to Saint John the Baptist by God Himself: to prepare the way for the Lord Jesus. But Saint John the Baptist was not a reed shaken by the wind. He was like a mighty tree, which not even the greatest gale could shake. And he knew perfectly well to what God had called him. He knew perfectly well what the will of God was. Therefore he answers those who question him: "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord," as the prophet Isaiah said. We see that Saint John the Baptist calls himself a voice, a voice that heralds, that proclaims the coming of Another. His own person, as it were, disappears entirely; he stands in the shadow.

THE BAPTISM OF PENANCE

Dear faithful, according to the prophecy of Ezekiel, the Saviour awaited for thousands of years was to cleanse His people by baptism. This is the first sacrament of the New Covenant: baptism, through which the soul is washed from sin. And in the book of Ezekiel we find the following words: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be cleansed, and I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. And I will give you a new heart, and put a new spirit within you. I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My spirit in the midst of you, and cause you to walk in My commandments, and to keep My precepts, and do them."

And that is precisely why those who come today to Saint John the Baptist ask him a question after he has denied that he is the Messiah: "Why do you baptize, if you are not he?" We must understand this properly. This baptism of penance administered by Saint John was a penitential rite, meant to symbolize the will to abandon sin in expectation of the coming of the Messiah. It was not a sacramental baptism; it was only a foretelling of the institution of the sacrament of holy baptism. And that is why Saint John says that he baptizes only with water, and that One greater than he is coming, the strap of whose sandals he is not worthy to loose. "He who comes after me was before me."

These words are nothing other than a confession, a pointing to the divinity of the Lord Jesus. After all, Saint John the Baptist was older than the Lord Jesus

by a few months. So how is it possible that "he who comes after me was before me"? Because the One who is drawing near is the One who is eternal, who has no beginning, who is God, Lord of heaven and earth.

ARCHBISHOP LEFEBVRE'S TESTAMENT

Dear faithful, thinking of the example of Saint John the Baptist, we realize how greatly we need, how greatly the world today and the Church need further Johns, who will not seek human applause, will not strive for the glare of the flashbulbs, but in humility will prepare the coming of the Lord Jesus. They will admonish sinners, instruct the ignorant, and give good counsel to the doubting.

Undoubtedly such a modern John the Baptist, who was not like a reed shaken by the wind, but with all his strength defended the Catholic faith and liturgy, was a great son of the Holy Church, Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre. And during the historic ceremony of the episcopal consecrations in 1988, by which consecrations he ensured the continuation of the Catholic priesthood and the preservation of the Most Holy Sacrifice of the Holy Mass, he spoke beautiful words which sum up his life's mission, his spiritual testament: "I hope and would wish that on my tomb – and without doubt that will come soon – there be written *Tradidi quod et accepi*, those words of Saint Paul: 'For I have received of the Lord that which I also delivered unto you.' I invent nothing. I am only a postman who brings a letter. I did not write this letter myself, this message, this word of God; God Himself wrote it, our Lord Jesus Christ. And we have passed it on through our beloved priests who are present here, and through all the others who for their part are convinced that they must offer resistance to this flood of apostasy in the Church by preserving the faith of all time and handing it on to the faithful. We are only the transmitters of this message, of this Gospel which our Lord Jesus Christ gave us, and the conveyors of the means of our salvation: the Holy Mass, the true Holy Mass, and the true sacraments, which give true spiritual life."

Dear faithful, may there be no lack today of spiritual sons of Saint John the Baptist. May there be no lack, in this time of confusion, of those who will prepare the way for the Saviour into human hearts. May we remain faithful to the Catholic faith unspoiled by error, and never allow ourselves to be led astray by false prophets, of whom there are so many among us today, who are leading so many souls straight into the fire of hell.

Gaudete, rejoice, I say to you, rejoice. For the Lord is near.

Amen. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen. Praised be Jesus Christ.