



# ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

## SIXTY YEAR JUBILEE OF PROFESSION

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU  
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault  
(Fontgombault, June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025)

*Bonum est confiteri Domino.*  
It is good to give praise to the Lord.  
(Ps 91 [92]:2)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,  
My dearly beloved Sons,  
and most especially you, who are celebrating today  
your sixty year jubilee of religious profession,

**I**NDEED, IT IS TRULY “good to give praise to the Lord” on the nativity of St. John the Baptist, and on the day on which one of us is celebrating his jubilee, a very special moment to give thanks and ask for forgiveness for the past, a special moment for hope for the future, too, but most of all an acceptable time for a renewal.

As the birth of the Precursor heralds the dawn of salvation — within six months we shall celebrate Christmas — we should remember that salvation doesn’t lie exclusively in its author, Christ, but that each of us needs to receive the path of salvation Christ has opened for us towards the Father, and day after day walk on it. To be born so as to be ceaselessly born again, in the expectation of our ultimate birth, that which will see our eyes opening to eternal light: such is the human vocation. On the path of life God’s succour is indispensable, and this is precisely the object of the Mass collect:

Grant to Thy people the grace of spiritual joys, and guide the souls of all the faithful into the way of eternal salvation.

Today, John the Baptist's life is shown as an icon of sanctity: a personal sanctity, in a heart to heart with his Lord, a sanctity that shines forth, for John is sent by God to bear witness to the light. He is the voice crying in the wilderness: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."<sup>a</sup> During the days of John, crowds coming from Jerusalem, from all Judaea and the whole Jordan district will set out to listen to his voice. At his side, men will confess their sins and receive a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins.

a. *Mt* 3:2.

Amidst the crowd, the Lord Himself came and tempted John's humility by offering Himself for baptism. He Who from the womb of his mother had called John by his name was there, made flesh, He was raising His voice and asking to receive John's baptism. John knew well this voice, and had always obeyed to its call. Yet, wasn't the Lord demanding too much? "I am the one who ought to be baptized by Thee, and Thou comest to me?"<sup>b</sup> The Lord's answer is surprising: "Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us to fulfil all righteousness."<sup>c</sup> And the evangelist pursues: "Then John consented."

b. *Mt* 3:14.

c. v. 15.

The voice of John attracted whole crowds. His actions touched their hearts. John reminds us that renouncing one's own will, obeying, means allowing God to act. Assuredly, John had received a mission. He had to act. Yet, this action was but an answer to the first calling still echoing. Once, God had called him. He still kept calling him. John in his mother's womb had leaped as his Saviour was coming near, and today also, he was leaping, through a perfect obedience to his Lord's voice. "My mother and my brethren are they who hear the word of God and do it."<sup>d</sup> This is a fitting summing-up of John's life.

d. *Lk* 8:21.

Then the miracle occurs. John's humility opens the door to a Trinitarian theophany:

And when Jesus was baptized, He went up immediately from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened and he

saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting on Him; and lo, a voice from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I find My joy."<sup>e</sup>

*e. Mt 3:16-17.*

Undoubtedly, the Father finds His joy in His Son. He also finds His joy in the obedience of John, as a few decades earlier He had found it in the answer of a maiden: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: let it be done to me according to thy word."<sup>f</sup> The words of Mary to the angel had given rise to a Trinitarian theophany, too.

*f. Lk 1:38.*

Through man's loving obedience, God manifests Himself. He answers the love of him who obeys. John will go to the utmost of his love, to the point of allowing God to strip him utterly bare of his disciples, and giving his own life.

Is it God Who takes away, or John himself who with too much insistence points out the path towards Christ and virtue?

"Behold the Lamb of God."<sup>g</sup> At these words, Andrew and John forsake the Baptist to follow Jesus. Pope Francis has commented on this moment:

*g. Jn 1:36.*

Every true vocation begins with an encounter with Jesus Who gives us joy and hope anew; and this vocation leads us, even through trials and difficulties, to an ever fuller encounter; that encounter, the encounter with Him, grows greater, and it leads us to the fullness of joy.

The Lord does not want men and women who walk behind him reluctantly, without having the wind of gladness in their hearts. [...]

Certainly there are trials in life; there are moments in which it is necessary to go forward despite the cold and the crosswinds, despite much bitterness. But Christians know the way that leads to that sacred fire which ignited them once and for ever. [...]

Let us not trust those who extinguish all nascent enthusiasm, saying that no undertaking is worth the sacrifice of a whole life. [...] God wants us to be able to dream like Him and with Him, as we journey, well aware of reality. [...] And if one dream is snuffed out, let us go back to dreaming of it again, drawing with hope from the memory of the beginning,

*h.* General audience,  
August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

*i.* *Lk* 1:66.

*j.* *Lk* 7:28.

*k.* Cf. *Rule*, ch. 4:21.

*l.* *Rule*, ch. 72.

from those embers that, perhaps after not such a good life, are hidden under the ashes of the first encounter with Jesus.<sup>*h*</sup>

“What then will this child be?”<sup>*i*</sup> Jesus answered this question: “Among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.”<sup>*j*</sup>

John the Baptist has been called “the monk of the New Testament.” He preferred nothing to the love of Christ.<sup>*k*</sup> According to the wish of St. Benedict for his sons, “may Christ lead us all together to everlasting life.”<sup>*l*</sup>

Amen.

