



ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST

Homily of the Right Reverend Dom Jean PATEAU
Abbot of Our Lady of Fontgombault
(Fontgombault, June 24th, 2026)

Manus Domini erat cum illo.
For the hand of the Lord was with him.
(Lk 1:66)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,
My dearly beloved Sons,

AMONG THE MULTITUDE of saints celebrated in the liturgical calendar, St. John the Baptist is honoured both on the day of his birth and on the day of his martyrdom. John's birth is the focus of today's feast.

The birth of a man is sacred, implying a divine word: "The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother He hath been mindful of my name."^a What was true for Isaiah is also true for John and for every man.

a. Is 49:1.

The birth of a life, especially a human life, should bring joy, particularly if that birth is unexpected. This was the case for Elizabeth, John's mother, who was already advanced in years.

If God gives the child a name of eternity, it also behoves the parents to name him. He will be called "John," declares the mother, meaning: "God gives grace." Faced with the astonishment of the neighbours and family members, the father confirms: "John is his name." Immediately, Zechariah regains his speech.

An elderly woman gives birth; a mute man regains his speech. In the coming of John, God truly gives grace.

b. Lk 1:66. “What then will this child be?” people ask. St. Luke clarifies the reason for the question: “For the hand of the Lord was with him.”^b Indeed, John’s mission is only just beginning, and the prophetic words of Zechariah confirm it: God wants to visit His people through him.

c. Jn 3:30. For John, the mission can be summed up in a few words: “He must increase, but I must decrease.”^c John will lose everything for Him to Whom he has dedicated his life. He will lose his disciples. He will choose the path of the desert, preaching a baptism of repentance and conversion: a voice crying out in the desert to parched hearts: “Make straight the way of the Lord.”^d Finally, John will lose his life, delivering in his martyrdom a final teaching, a teaching that remains relevant today, a lesson for those who, by virtue of their position, wield authority over society.

d. Jn 1:23.

The three Synoptic Gospels recount the arrest of John the Baptist. Preaching to the crowds, John did not hesitate to tackle princes. He rebuked Herod the Tetrarch for his wicked deeds, and in particular for his affair with Herodias, the wife of his brother, Philip.

Although he feared the crowds who considered John a prophet, Herod respected John. He knew that he was a righteous man and wanted to protect him. The king’s heart was torn.

Such is the fate of the sinner, of he who refuses to take a step towards a life of consistency. Yet, the call to conversion does not fall on deaf ears. He knows that this is what would bring him peace. Like John, he longs to be able to say, “He must increase, but I must decrease.” But fleeing from a face-to-face with God, he refuses to choose to serve Him.

This question of life consistency has confronted politicians of all eras, and in a more radical way those who profess to be disciples of Christ. Pius XI affirmed in 1927, “Politics is the highest form of charity.” It can also become the site of its worst corruption, when the institutions of a country come to promote what is evil.

Speaking recently to members of the Spanish parliament in Madrid, the Pope recalled:

Politics, too, must acknowledge a force that precedes and transcends it. [...] A law does not attain its true greatness merely by having been formally enacted; it attains it when, in addition to being valid in form, it can stand before the dignity of the person and pass that test without shame.^e

e. Address to the Congress of Deputies (Madrid), June 8th, 2026.

John or Herod. Consistency unto martyrdom, or compromise unto crime and apostasy. Such is indeed the choice that every man may have to make, after having enlightened his conscience in the face of an unjust law.

While our parliamentarians, our ministers, our president, have taken up the issue of euthanasia, and while the adoption of a bill contrary to natural law seems to be taking shape, what can be said? what can be done?

John said to Herod, “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife.”^f Herod knew this all too well, therefore he made his own law, a law outside justice, a law that was no law at all. John was unjustly imprisoned.

f. Mk 6:18.

A banquet, a dancer rewarded by an imprudent promise: “Whatsoever thou shalt ask I will give thee, though it be the half of my kingdom,”^g Herodias’ cruelty, all this brings about John’s death.

g. Mk 6:23.

Assuredly, the king is saddened, but because of his promise and the guests, he orders the beheading. Once again, the politician finds himself confronted with the inconsistency of his life. What is the value of a rash promise, compared to a human life?

In the same address to members of the Spanish parliament in Madrid, the Pope asked the question: “What conception of the human person inspires laws, and what kind of society do those laws build?”

And continuing, he invited society to consider the human being not as “just a cog in the social, economic or political order,” but “as someone whose dignity takes precedence over all utility and to whose service legislative action is subject.” He then added:

The defence of human life is neither a partisan issue nor a confessional interest: it is a goal of civilisation. Every human life must be recognised and safeguarded from its conception to its natural end, in every circumstance of its existence. When this certainty is obscured, the most vulnerable are the first victims, and the law loses its deepest meaning: to serve and protect every person. For this reason, the moral greatness of a nation is manifested, above all, in its capacity to accompany, protect and love those lives that are most fragile.^h

h. Loc. cit.

Let us entrust to Mary, terror of demons and protectress of families, the destiny of our country. While our parliamentarians arrogate to themselves the right to make anthropological choices that endanger human life, beyond electoral promises enslaved to the culture of death, John's words fall as irrevocably as a thunderbolt: "It is not lawful."

Amen.

