

A Cousin's Connection

We know from our Advent and Christmas reflections that Jesus' cousin, John the Baptist, was an important figure in the life of the Messiah. Remember Elizabeth acknowledging Mary's unborn child as "my Lord" (Luke 1:44) and exuberantly saying that at the sound of Mary's greeting, "the infant in my womb leaped for joy." (v:45) Since the love between their mothers is evident, we can only imagine that as John and Jesus grew up, they came to an understanding of their importance to one another. However, we may miss the excitement generated by John the Baptist's presence.

John had a specific role which he carried out perfectly and, in doing so, he really became a model and "influencer" in the lives of the baptized. After "the word of God came to John" (Luke 3:2) John responded and took on his ministry with great vigor. He baptized with water and called people to conversion, to a change of heart, to turn away from their old ways and seek forgiveness. The forgiveness that John advocated demanded that his converts care for others. If a baptized person had two tunics, he/she was expected to offer the second tunic to someone in need. Converts were expected to routinely produce "good fruit" deeds. (Luke 3: 8, 11) John lives out his calling as the precursor, the herald, the reformer, who saw to it that his community was spiritually ready for Christ.

Jesus role is that of the Messiah. Following a history of prophecy, Jesus appears, called to be the savior of all who profess their belief in the person and ministry of the Christ.

Important events in Jesus's ministry are always marked by prayer. In the Gospel of Luke, the transition from John's baptism to baptism of the Holy Spirit occurs as Jesus prays. He begins his public ministry with a cosmic occurrence, "heaven was opened" (Luke 3:21) and we actually hear the voice of God. We will hear the voice of God again a few days after the first prediction of Jesus' passion. As Jesus prays with Peter, James and John, they are engulfed in a cloud, Jesus is transfigured, and we hear the voice of God, "This is my son, the chosen one. Listen to him. (Luke 9:34-35)

In reading today's scripture passage, it is affective to imagine how God sounds. God is calling us "This is my beloved Son, my Gift to you, your Brother, listen to him." Today, that is our role. Through baptism into the Christian community, we are called to be disciples, here to announce and point out Jesus and to carry out his mission of loving and serving others—those who may not need a tunic but do need our love and prayers.

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