

Meditations

By John Baptist de La Salle

Third Sunday of Advent

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St. John the Baptist icon by Olga Christine

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GOSPEL: SAINT JOHN 1:19–28

Those who teach others are merely the voice that prepares hearts; it belongs to God to prepare them by his grace to receive him.

3.1 First Point

The Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask Saint John who he was: the Christ, Elijah, or a Prophet.¹ Saint John told them he was none of these, but he declared, I am the voice of one crying in the desert: make straight the way of the Lord.² Saint John wished to leave to Jesus Christ all the honor of converting souls, the task at which he labored so constantly. He said, therefore, that he was only a voice crying out in the desert.³ He thus showed that the substance of the doctrine he taught was not his own and that it was indeed the word of God which he preached; as for himself, he was only the voice which proclaimed it. In the same way that a voice is a sound that strikes the ear and makes it possible for a word to be heard, so it was that Saint John prepared the Jews to receive Jesus Christ.

The same thing is true of those who instruct others. They are only the voice of the One who disposes hearts to accept Jesus Christ and his holy teaching. The one who disposes them, according to Saint Paul, can only be God,⁴ who imparts to human beings the gift of speaking of him. According to the same Apostle, when you speak all the tongues, both angelic and human, if you lack charity,⁵ or rather, if it is not God who makes you speak and who uses your voice to reveal himself and his sacred mysteries, you are nothing but sounding brass and tinkling cymbals.⁶ All you say will produce no good effect and will not be capable of bringing about any good results.

Let us, then, humble ourselves by considering that we are nothing but a voice and that of ourselves we cannot say anything that will do the least good for souls or make any impression on them. For we are a mere voice, only a sound, which becomes nothing once it has echoed through the air.

3.2 Second Point

Those who teach are only God's voice. The word that makes God known to those whom they instruct must come from him; it is God who speaks in teachers when they explain him and what is related to him. This is why Saint Peter says, If any speak, let it always be clear that God is speaking by their mouth; if any fulfill a ministry, let them do so as acting only by the power God communicates to them, so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.⁷

Saint Peter also says on the subject of the truth he was preaching, I will never give up warning you of these things, even though you already know the truth about them, and it is established in you.⁸ He adds, We have the word of the Prophets, which is firmly established and to which you do well to be attached, for it is like a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in our hearts. It was not through human will that in times past prophecy was uttered; rather, it was by the movement of the Holy Spirit that these prophets of God spoke.⁹

It is also by the movement of the Spirit of God that all those who today proclaim his kingdom continue to speak. But if God makes use of people to announce the truths of Christianity to others and to prepare their hearts to be docile to these truths, it is God alone, as the Wise Man says, who must guide their steps¹⁰ and impart to their hearts the docility they need in order to welcome these holy truths that he is making known to them.

Do not be content, therefore, to read and to learn from others what you must teach your students. Pray God to impress all these truths so firmly in you that you will have no occasion to be or to consider that you are anything, as Saint Paul says, but the ministers of God and the dispensers of his mysteries.¹¹

3.3 Third Point

Saint Zechariah, the father of Saint John the Baptist, says, in the canticle he sang at the birth of his son, that the reason why Saint John is to walk before Jesus Christ and to prepare the way for him is to bring to his people the knowledge of salvation.¹² But this knowledge is not enough; it is necessary for God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord,

to show us the path we must follow and to inspire us to walk in the footsteps of his Son.

Although in this life we sigh under the weight of our bodies and long to be free of this burden,¹³ it is God who created us for this very purpose and who gave us his Holy Spirit as a pledge.¹⁴ It is, then, up to God to direct our path straight toward heaven, so that we may surely arrive there. For this reason, it was as the Son of God that Jesus Christ became the Author of our eternal salvation.¹⁵ Salvation, as the Prophet says, comes from God;¹⁶ perfection likewise comes from him. As Saint James assures us, every excellent grace and perfect gift come from on high and descend from the Father of lights.¹⁷

Beg God, therefore, to lead you on the way to heaven by the path he has traced out for you. Ask him to help you embrace the perfection of your state, because he is the one who brought you into it and who consequently desired, and still desires, that you find in it the way and the means to be sanctified.

1. Jn 1:19–21
2. Jn 1:23
3. Jn 1:23
4. 1 Cor 3:5–6
5. 1 Cor 13:1
6. 1 Cor 13:1
7. 1 Pt 4:11
8. 2 Pt 1:12
9. 2 Pt 1:19–21
10. Prv 16:9
11. 1 Cor 4:1
12. Lk 1:76–77
13. 2 Cor 5:2
14. 2 Cor 5:5
15. Heb 5:9
16. Ps 37:39
17. Jas 1:17