WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

AN ADVENT RETREAT GUIDE ON JOHN, CHAPTER 1

COMPANION GUIDE

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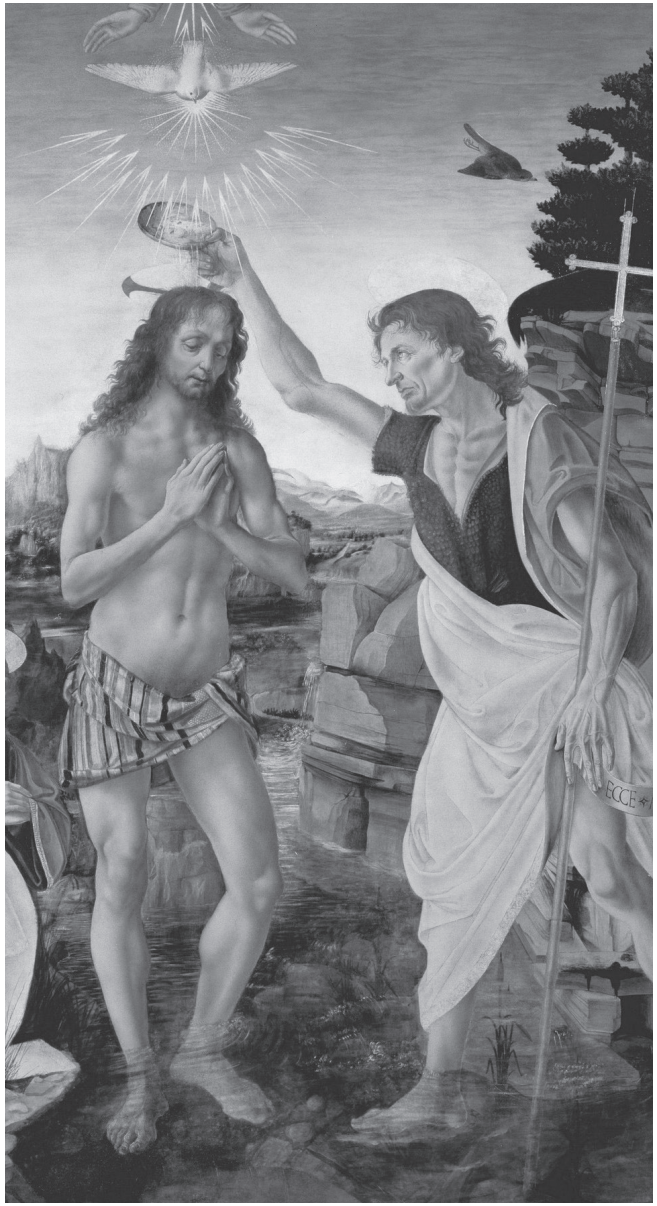

FIRST MEDITATION

Two Creations

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. When have I most felt God's presence (heard his loving word) in the beauty, order, and magnificence of nature and the universe, God's first creation? How can I give myself time and space to continue encountering him there? Speak to him about that in your own words…

2. Take some time to imagine what was in God's heart and mind when he decided to redeem the fallen world by becoming one of us and dwelling among us. Why would he choose to save us that way? Speak to him about that in your own words …

3. How would I describe my worldview? Is it fully Christian, or is it still affected by some non-Christian assumptions and ideas?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.
For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things were created through him and for him.
He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

He is the head of the body, the church.
He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
that in all things he himself might be preeminent.
For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
and through him to reconcile all things for him,
making peace by the blood of his cross [through
him], whether those on earth or those in heaven.

—*Colossians 1:15–20*
NABRE

God, who creates and conserves all things by his Word, provides men with constant evidence of himself in created realities. And furthermore, wishing to open up the way to heavenly salvation—he manifested himself to our first parents from the very beginning. He invited them to intimate communion with himself and clothed them with resplendent grace and justice. This revelation was not broken off by our first parents' sin. After the fall, [God] buoyed them up with the hope of salvation, by promising redemption; and he has never ceased to show his solicitude for the human race. For he wishes to give eternal life to all those who seek salvation by patience in well-doing. "Even when he disobeyed you and lost your friendship you did not abandon him to the power of death … Again and again you offered a covenant to man."

—CCC, 54–55

… I went across the garden one afternoon and stopped on the shore of the lake; I stood there for a long time, contemplating my surroundings. Suddenly, I saw the Lord Jesus near me, and he graciously said to me, "All this I created for you … and know that all this beauty is nothing compared to what I have prepared for you in eternity."

—St. Faustina Kowalska

NOTES

SECOND MEDITATION

The Master's Gaze

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

1. Use your imagination to picture Jesus gazing at the two disciples, and picture them looking back at him. What strikes you about the scene, and what might God be saying to you through it? Speak to the Lord about that in your own words …

2. Recall some of the times when you didn't welcome God's invitation in your life. Think about why that was, and express your sorrow to the Lord. Now recall some of the times when you did welcome God's invitation, and speak to the Lord about those encounters …

3. Advent and Christmas are all about Jesus coming close us so that we can continue to "come and see" what he has for us. How will you do that this Advent? How can the symbols of the Christmas season help you do that? How does God want you to do that?

QUOTATIONS TO HELP YOUR PRAYER

> It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness; he is waiting for you when nothing else you find satisfies you; he is the beauty to which you are so attracted; it is he who provoked you

with that thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise; it is he who urges you to shed the masks of a false life; it is he who reads in your heart your most genuine choices, the choices that others try to stifle.

—St. John Paul II—World Youth Day Vigil, 2000

Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures –
I wish no more than this, O Lord.
Into your hands I commend my soul:
I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord, and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.

—St. Charles de Foucault—Prayer of Abandonment to God's Will

The expression "following of Christ" is a description of the whole of Christian existence. In what does it consist? What does "to follow Christ" actually mean? At the outset, with the first disciples, its meaning was very simple and immediate: it meant that to go with Jesus these people decided to give up their profession, their affairs, their whole life. It meant undertaking a new profession: discipleship … But with this it is also clear what "following" means for us and what its true essence is for us: it is an interior change of life. It requires me no longer to be withdrawn into myself, considering my own fulfillment the main reason for my life. It requires me to give myself freely to Another—for truth, for love, for God who, in Jesus Christ, goes before me and shows me the way. It is a question of the fundamental decision no longer to consider usefulness and gain, my career and success as the ultimate goals of my life, but instead to recognize truth and love as authentic criteria. It is a question of choosing between living only for myself or giving myself—for what is greater. And let us understand properly that truth and love are not abstract values; in Jesus Christ they have become a person. By following him, I enter into the service of truth and love. By losing myself I find myself.

—Pope Benedict XVI, Palm Sunday Homily, 2007

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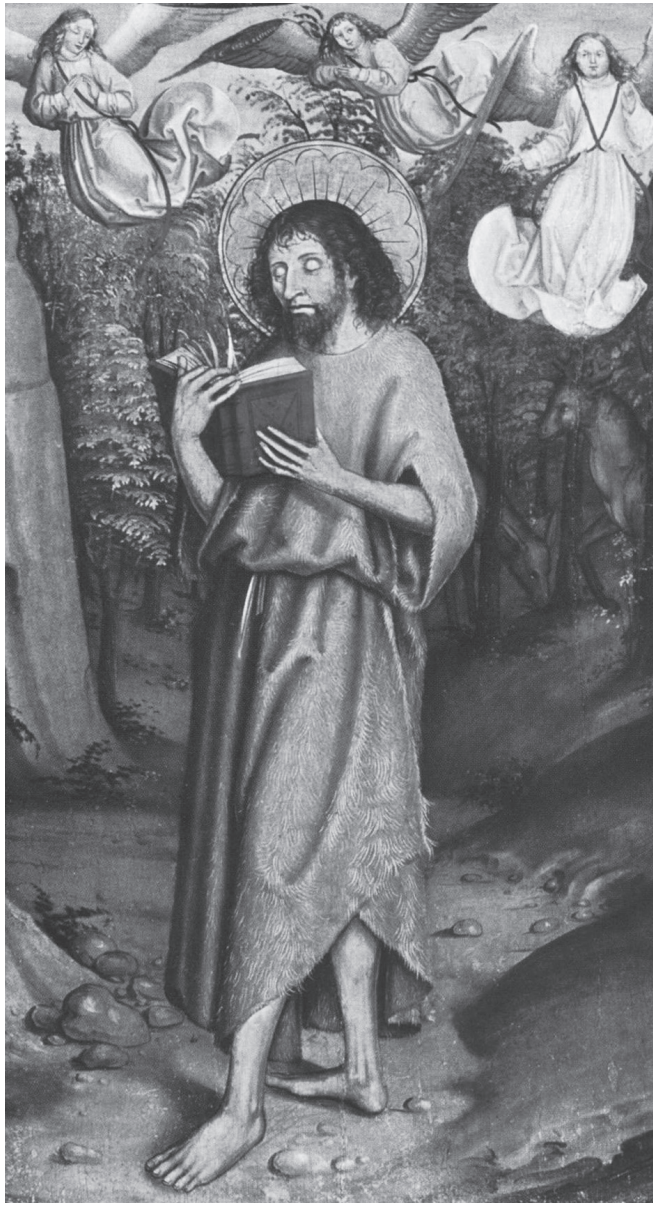

CONFERENCE

St. John the Baptist: Model of a Missionary DIsciple

1. Jesus called his disciples “the light of the world” and “the salt of the earth.” Read the following verses and ask: What do these verses really mean to me personally? What should they mean to me? *You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its taste, with what can it be seasoned? It is no longer good for anything but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father.* (Matthew 5:13– 16)

2. In what ways do I feel “sent by God”, as John the Baptist was?

3. How would I describe my mission in life? How would Jesus describe it? Maybe take some time to write out a personal mission statement that brings together your dreams, the responsibilities of your state in life, and your awareness of being a missionary disciple of Jesus Christ.

4. St. John the Baptist fulfilled his God-given mission faithfully, but he ended up being imprisoned and beheaded. What expectations do I have for my life and mission? What expectations does God have?

5. For me, what would a “successful life” look like?

6. How well do I know Jesus? What has helped me, in the past, to get to know Jesus better? What can I adjust in my daily living, or what one thing can I do in the next month, that will help me continue getting to know Jesus better?

7. What am I most looking forward to in these Advent and Christmas seasons? Why? What am I most dreading about these Advent and Christmas seasons? Why?

8. When was the last time I bore witness to Jesus with my words? Looking forward to the week ahead, what opportunities will I have to bear witness to Jesus with my words? Make a resolution to courageously take advantage of those opportunities.

9. How do I bear witness to Jesus in the way I live my normal duties and relationships? In what ways do I contradict my Christian identity in the way I live them? What change can I make this week to bear witness better in those areas?

10. How do I bear witness to Jesus in my works (works of mercy, apostolic activities, etc.)? How is God asking me to bear witness to him in my works? What dreams has Jesus planted in my heart in this regard? What can I do about those dreams in the coming month?

NOTES

FURTHER READING

If you feel moved to continue reflecting and praying about this theme, you may find the following books helpful:

The Lord
by Roman Guardini

Jesus of Nazareth: The Infancy Narratives
by Pope Benedict XVI

A Christmas Carol
by Charles Dickens

Go! 30 Meditations on How Best to Love Your Neighbor as Yourself
by Fr John Bartunek, LC

EXPLORING MORE

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