BEING INFINITELY LOVED

The relationship between Jesus and John the Baptist was not always crystal-clear; at times, it was even tenuous—no thanks to the zeal of their early followers. There were tensions and competition among these disciples. At one time, John was told about Jesus, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing and everyone is coming to him” (Jn 3:26). We can sense a tinge of envy among Jesus’ disciples when one of them asked Jesus, “Lord, teach us to pray as John taught his disciples” (Lk 11:2). At the start of the preaching of the Gospel, Paul encountered in Ephesus people “baptized with the baptism of John,” who might have believed that John was the Messiah. Paul had to tell them, “John baptized with a baptism of repentance, telling the people to believe in the one who was to come after him, that is, in Jesus” (Acts 19:3-4).

The writers of the New Testament, who wrote years after Jesus’ actual public ministry, would follow the line of St. Paul, that is, put Jesus and John in their proper places: Jesus is the Messiah, and John is the forerunner. In Luke, Zechariah prophesies of his son, “You, child, will be called prophet of the Most High, for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way” (Lk 1:76). In Matthew, John is reluctant to baptize Jesus, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me?” (Mt 3:14). And in John, those who asked if the Baptist might be the Messiah was met by the following reply: “I baptize with water, but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie” (Jn 1:26).

The Gospel today presents John in prison. His audacity to condemn the illicit union of Herod Antipas and Herodias landed the Baptist in chains. While incarcerated, John has some questions about Jesus. If Jesus is the Messiah indeed, where are the signs of the righteous anger toward the impious? Where is the ax of the Messiah that cuts the roots of evil men? Where is his fire that burns people who are like useless chaff? Maybe John is waiting for the Messiah to bolt him out of Herod’s prison. Can Jesus indeed be the Messiah?

Jesus does not respond with a kind of self-presentation as the Messiah. He does not say, “Yes, I am the one who is to come; you should not look for another.” Jesus prefers to speak indirectly of what is happening before the eyes of all the blind regain their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have the good news proclaimed to them. What happens is thoroughly “messianic,” and for those who understand, Jesus indeed is the Messiah.

John’s doubt in no way diminishes his glory. Jesus himself pays John the highest honor: Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist.” John is the last of the prophets, bridging the time of promise and the time of fulfillment. The disciples, then, are “greater” than he because they are witnesses of Jesus, in whom the kairos or the “acceptable time” of the Lord has come.

Today’s “Gaudete Sunday,” Sunday of Rejoicing. This year it precedes our tradition of Simbang Gabi, emphasizing the joy and excitement that comes with the nearing of Christmas. Still, we cannot totally dispel the gloom that hovers over our personal lives and our life as a nation. Where are the Christian values that we hold dear? Will Christmas come and go without making a dent in our lives—for the better?

We hold on to Jesus, “that his joy may be in us and our joy may be complete” (Jn 15:11). Here it is good to bear in mind the words of Pope Francis, “Hard times may come, when the cross casts its shadow, yet nothing can destroy the supernatural joy that adapts and changes, but always endures, even as a flicker of light born of our personal certainty that, when everything is said and done, we are infinitely loved” (Gaudete et Exsultate, no. 125).

Fr. Gil Alinsangan, SSP

Pastoral Catechesis for the Year of Eumenism, Interreligious Dialogue, and Indigenous People

Communion Ecclesiology of Vatican II

The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) can validly be described as a “council of the Church about the Church.” This phrase captures the fact that all the world’s bishops were invited to attend: it also asserts that the central agenda of the Council was the renewal of the Church, both in her inner life (ad intra) and her relations with the wider world (ad extra).

This ecclesiological vision has been termed “communion ecclesiology.” This means that the fundamental reality of the Church is community and communion. The New Testament captures this concept with the Greek word: koinonia. Note also that the three fundamental Biblical images of Church are all focused on community/communion: People of God, Body of Christ, and Temple of the Holy Spirit.

This year, the CBCP asks Catholics to direct their focus to Ecumenism (relations with other Christian believers and churches), to Interreligious Dialogue (relations with the followers of other living faiths), and to Indigenous Peoples (the numerous cultural communities in our nation). We are to grow in understanding, appreciation, dialogue, and mutual “communion” with members of these groups; they are truly our neighbors. We seek to practice “good neighbor-ology” with these people, our brothers and sisters!
Entrance Antiphon
[Phil 4:4–5]
(Recited when there is no opening song)
Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Indeed, the Lord is near.

Lighting of the Advent Candles
The lighting of the third candle (rose or pink) of the Advent wreath may be made after the entrance song, with the following or similar prayer:

P — Father, at the height of our Advent walk, we relight the candles of hope and peace, and we light the candle of joy. Grant us the joy that comes with the hope of the Savior’s coming: joy in the face of apathy, joy in the face of sorrow, joy in the face of uncertainty.
All — Amen.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)
P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(May be read using these or other similar words)

P — The third Sunday of Advent is Gaudete Sunday—Sunday of joy, Sunday of rejoicing. Our entrance antiphon recalls Paul’s exhortation: “Rejoice in the Lord always!” Isaiah invites God’s people to meet the Lord with joy and gladness. And to John the Baptist’s messengers Jesus reveals that he is indeed the awaited one, the Messiah who has brought good news to the poor.

Penitential Act
P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)
All — I confess to almighty God and to you, my brothers and sisters, that I have greatly sinned, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, (strike your breast) through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault; therefore I ask blessed

Mary ever-Virgin, all the
Angels and Saints, and you, my
brothers and sisters, to pray for
me to the Lord our God.
P — May almighty God have
mercy on us, forgive our sins,
and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.
P — Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.
P — Christ, have mercy.
All — Christ, have mercy.
P — Lord, have mercy.
All — Lord, have mercy.
(The Gloria is omitted, except for the Agnus Dei Mass.)

Collect
P — Let us pray. (Pause)
O God, who see how your people faithfully await the feast of the Lord’s Nativity, enable us, we pray, to attain the joys of so great a salvation and to celebrate them always with solemn worship and glad rejoicing.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Is 35:1–6a, 10]
(Sit)
The people suffering in exile
will return to their land with
songs of joy. It is with the same
joyful spirit that we await the
coming of the Lord who will
soon visit his people.

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

THE DESERT and the parched
land will exult; the steppe will
rejoice and bloom. They will
bloom with abundant flowers,
and rejoice with joyful song.
The glory of Lebanon will be
given to them, the splendor of
Carmel and Sharon; they will
see the glory of the LORD,
the splendor of our God.
Strengthen the hands
that are feeble, make firm
the knees that are weak, say
to those whose hearts are
frightened: Be strong, fear not!
Here is your God, he comes
with vindication; with divine
recompense he comes to save
you. Then will the eyes of
the blind be opened, the ears
of the deaf be cleared; then will
the lame leap like a stag, then
the tongue of the mute will
sing.

Those whom the LORD has
ransomed will return and enter
Zion singing, crowned with
everlasting joy; they will meet
with joy and gladness, sorrow
and mourning will flee.
— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 146)

R — Lord, come and save us.
E. C. Maffo

Lord, come and save us.

1. The LORD God keeps faith forever,/ secures justice for the oppressed,/ gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets captives free. (R)
2. The LORD gives sight to the
blind; the LORD raises up those
who were bowed down. The
LORD loves the just; the LORD
protects strangers. (R)
3. The fatherless and the
widow he sustains, but the
way of the wicked he thwartes.
The LORD shall reign forever,
your God, O Zion, through all
generations. (R)

Second Reading (Jas 5:7–10)
The apostle James admonishes
Christians to remain steadfast
in their faith and to live in love
and peace with one another.

A reading from the Letter of
Saint James

BE PATIENT, brothers and
sisters, until the coming of the
Lord. See how the farmer
waits for the precious fruit of
the earth, being patient with
it until it receives the early
and the late rains. You too
must be patient. Make your
hearts firm, because the coming
of the Lord is at hand. Do
not complain, brothers and
sisters, about one another,
Homily (Sit)

Profession of Faith (Stand)

All — I believe in one God, the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only Begotten Son of God, born of the Father before all ages. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven,

(At the words that follow, up to and including became man, all bow)

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate, he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead and his kingdom will have no end.

I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

I believe in one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church. I confess one Baptism for the forgiveness of sins and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Prayer of the Faithful

P — With confidence, let us pray to the Lord to fill our hearts with joy, joy that only the Lord can give, joy that will strengthen us as we wait for his coming. Let us pray:

R — Lord, make us rejoice in you.

C — That the Holy Father Francis, bishops, priests, deacons, and consecrated men and women may find joy in the Lord and in return strengthen the weak and the weary among us, we pray:

C — That those who exercise authority among us may shun luxury and corruption and instead follow the example of John the Baptist who lived a life of austerity and integrity, we pray:

C — That those broken by sorrow, disappointment, or loneliness, especially among the young people who need our care and attention, may know the gentle healing of Christ and experience joy especially this coming season of Christmas, we pray:

C — That those who mourn the death of their loved ones may draw comfort from our belief that the just ones who have gone to sleep are now with God, we pray:

C — Let us pray for the urgent concerns of our community and our personal intentions (pause), we pray:

P — God our Father, hear our prayers. As we await the gift of your Son, dismiss all our anxieties and fill us with joy.

Through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist

Presentation of the Gifts (Stand)

P — Pray, brethren...

All — May the Lord accept the sacrifice at your hands for the praise and glory of his name, for our good and the good of all his holy Church.

Prayer over the Offerings

P — May the sacrifice of our worship, Lord, we pray, be offered to you unceasingly, to complete what was begun in sacred mystery and powerfully accomplish for us your saving work.

Through Christ our Lord.

All — Amen.
Preface I of Advent

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.
P — Lift up your hearts.
All — We lift them up to the Lord.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
All — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For he assumed at his first coming the lowliness of human flesh, and so fulfilled the design you formed long ago, and opened for us the way to eternal salvation, that, when he comes again in glory and majesty and all is as last made manifest, we who watch for that day may inherit the great promise in which now we dare to hope.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:
All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord, God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.
(Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — When we eat this Bread and drink this Cup, we proclaim your Death, O Lord, until you come again.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invocation to Peace

Invocation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon
(Cf. Is 35:4)

Say to the faint of heart: Be strong and do not fear. Behold, our God will come, and he will save us.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
We implore your mercy, Lord, that this divine sustenance may cleanse us of our faults and prepare us for the coming feasts.
Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)
May the almighty and merciful God, by whose grace you have placed your faith in the First Coming of his Only Begotten Son and yearn for his coming again, sanctify you by the radiance of Christ’s Advent and enrich you with his blessing.
All — Amen.
P — As you run the race of this present life, may he make you firm in faith, joyful in hope, and active in charity.
All — Amen.
P — So that, rejoicing now with devotion at the Redeemer’s coming in the flesh, you may be endowed with the rich reward of eternal life when he comes again in majesty.
All — Amen.
P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (1) and the Holy Spirit come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.