



RETREAT GUIDE

**WHAT ARE YOU
LOOKING FOR?**

**AN ADVENT RETREAT
GUIDE ON JOHN,
CHAPTER I**

FR. JOHN BARTUNEK, LC, STHD

© 2019 RCSpirituality Center

Scripture texts in this work are taken from the New American Bible, revised edition © 2010, 1991, 1986, 1970 Confraternity of Christian Doctrine, Washington, D.C..

Excerpts from the English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church for use in the United States of America © 1994, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana. English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica © 1997, United States Catholic Conference, Inc.—Libreria Editrice Vaticana.

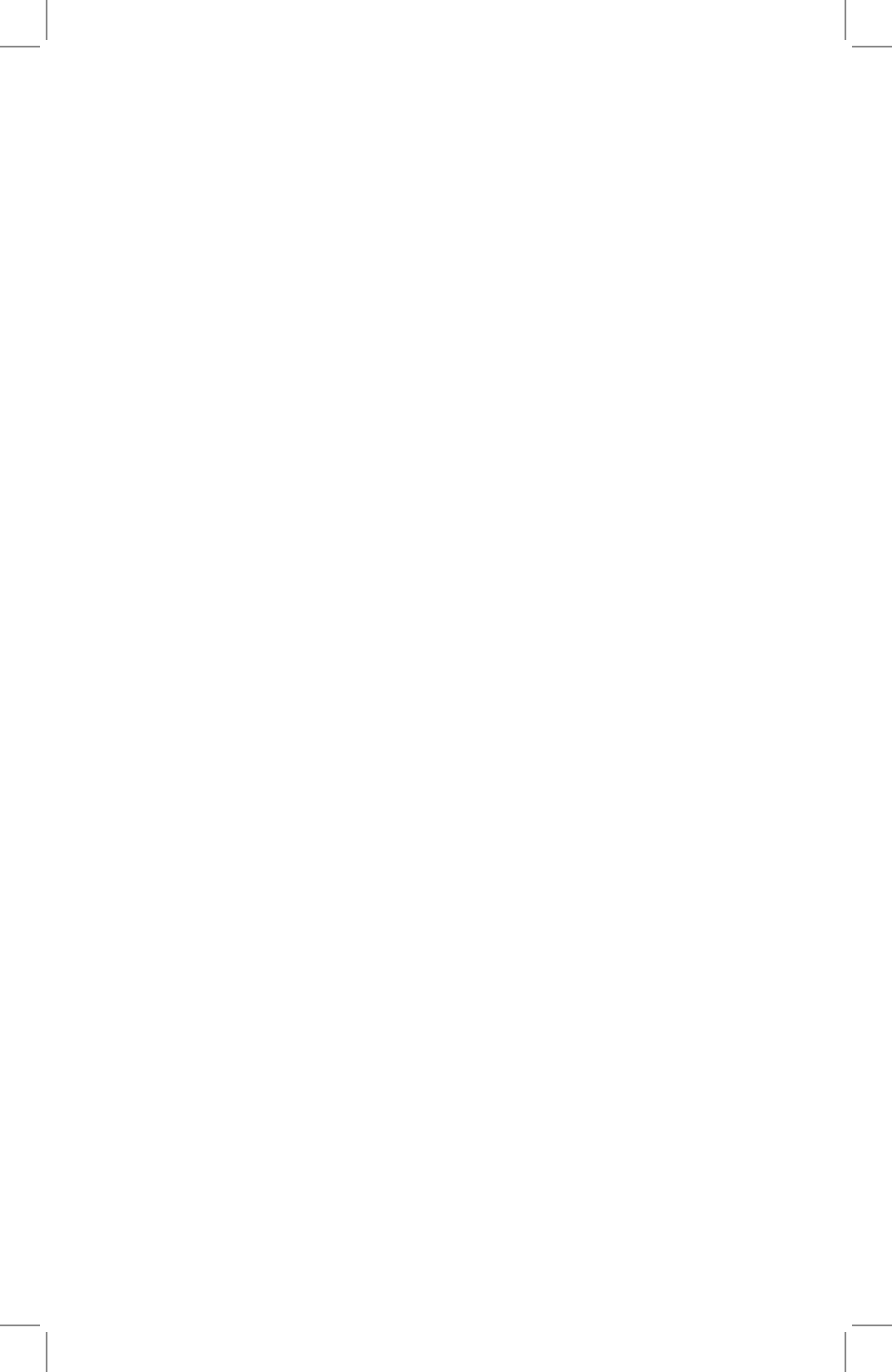
Printed in the United States of America

Cover and interior design by Coronation Media

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any manner whatsoever, except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without prior written permission from the publisher.

ISBN-13: 9781075391804

This booklet is a part of RCSpirituality's *Retreat Guide* service, which includes free online videos and audio tracks available at **RCSpirituality.org**.



INTRODUCTION

What Are You Looking For?



RETREAT OVERVIEW

On Christmas morning, and on weekdays throughout the Christmas season, the Church's liturgy invites us to delve deeply into the first Chapter of the Gospel of John.

John the Evangelist was an eye-witness of the events he describes. And since he was at the same time both the youngest and also the longest-living of the Twelve Apostles, he had a whole lifetime to contemplate the significance of those events.

A meditative reading of his words, a *lectio divina* of John I, therefore, can be a powerful way to live the season of Advent, which is designed to help us discover afresh the wonder and the meaning of the Incarnation of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And that's exactly what we will do in this Advent Retreat Guide, *What Are You Looking For?*

- In the First Meditation, we will savor John 1:1–18—his famous prologue, which sets the stage for his entire Gospel.
- In the Second Meditation, we will jump ahead to the end of the Chapter and consider the initial meeting between Jesus and his very first disciples—an unforgettable encounter that can help refresh our own relationship with the Lord.
- And in the conference, we will reflect on one of Advent's key players: John the Baptist. He was the first person to announce the Gospel by bearing witness to Jesus. By taking a closer look at how he lived his mission, we will get some practical tips on how each of us can live our own mission.

Let's begin by quieting our hearts and turning our attention to God, who never stops paying attention to us. Let's ask him for all the graces we need, and especially for the grace of a fruitful Advent, so that this year when Christmas rolls around, we will find—in a new and deeper way—what our hearts are truly looking for.

NOTES



FIRST MEDITATION

Two Creations



INTRODUCTION

Let's begin by simply reading some of the very first verses of the Gospel of John, verses rich both in poetic beauty and theological depth. Let's enjoy these familiar and yet mysterious words that God has given to us:

“
In the beginning was the Word,
and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
He was in the beginning with God.
All things came to be through him,
and without him nothing came to be.
What came to be through him was life,
and this life was the light of the human race;
the light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it ...

And the Word became flesh
and made his dwelling among us,
and we saw his glory,
the glory as of the Father's only Son,
full of grace and truth.

—John 1:1–5, 14

THE FIRST CREATION

Only the Gospel of John calls Jesus “the Word” of God. This term was rich in meaning for both of John's primary audiences, his fellow Jews and the Greek-speaking pagans of the Roman Empire.

The Greek term used for “Word” is “logos,” which can refer to the very structure of the created universe, the

order and the beauty of all things, the design present in the divine mind and translated into the cosmos.

When St. John declares that this “logos” was both *with* God and *was* God, he is connecting the Gospel to the intuitions of the pagan philosophers. They could relate to that, to the concept of a divine order and design behind all things. But then, when St. John declares that “all things came to be through him,” he takes the pagan philosophers further than they had ever gone.

For the philosophers, the “logos” was built into the universe; it was part of the universe. But here John is pointing out that in truth, the source of the beauty and order of the cosmos is to be found *outside* of it. God, St. John asserts, is not part of the universe, and the universe is not God. Rather, God is the *creator* of the universe, the source and origin of all things.

ESCAPE OR FULFILLMENT?

For us as Christians, and even for Jewish believers, this seems obvious. But for the pre-Christian world—and even for our post-Christian world—it wasn’t so obvious. Many non-Christian religions identify the universe itself with the divinity. This pantheistic point of view has dire consequences for human experience. If everything is God, then that includes us as well. From this perspective, we would no longer be true individuals, true persons, rather we would just be little pieces of the divinity, sparks of some impersonal force that undulates under the surface of all things.

This is why so many non-Christian religions see the point of life as *escaping* from what they identify as the illusion of

self. Religion for them is not about a personal relationship with God, but about finding how to dissolve oneself back into the unseen ground of all being.

But if, as St. John asserts, “all things came to be” through the “logos” of God, and if “without him nothing came to be,” then everything changes. The world around us suddenly has real meaning: it is meant to be a place to encounter a creative and loving God, a personal God. It is a gift from God to us, a revelation of God’s goodness and power; a message; a word spoken to us so that we could hear and respond and so enter into friendship with our Creator.

And this is what St. John alludes to when he points out how that same “logos” of God that was the source of the universe also gave a particular gift to the human race. The human race was not just part of the material cosmos, but was given a special kind of life, a “life which was the light of the human race.”

This light is the spiritual soul of every human being. This light is another way of saying, as Moses put it in the Book of Genesis, that we, unlike squirrels and spiders and rocks and red giants, are created in the image and likeness of God. The meaning of life is no longer to be found in dissolving ourselves back into an impersonal ground of being, but in hearing the Word of God and responding, entering into an ongoing encounter - a relationship - with our Creator and Lord.

These few verses, then, are presenting an entire worldview, a *new* worldview, a worldview that opens up new horizons of meaning for pre or post-Christian pagans and gives us all an amazing hope for the fulfillment

of our deepest desires—the desires to know and to be known, to love and be loved, deeply, personally, and everlastingly.

REDEMPTION: A SECOND CREATION

For St. John’s Jewish audience, allusions to the “Word” of God would also have conjured up memories of the verses from Genesis that described how the creation of the universe occurred through God *speaking forth* the existence of the different creatures, beginning with light itself: “Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light.”

The power of God’s word to bring existence out of nothingness, order out of chaos, and light out of darkness, is a theme that runs throughout the Old Testament. This creative word of God is often personified as *wisdom*, who existed at God’s side before the creation of the world and somehow shared in the work of that creation. Here is how it is expressed in the Book of Wisdom:

“Wisdom sings her own praises,
among her own people she proclaims her glory...
From the mouth of the Most High I came forth,
and covered the earth like a mist ...
Before all ages, from the beginning, he created me,
and through all ages I shall not cease to be.

—Wisdom 24:1, 3, 9

We hear the echo of those verses in St. John’s Gospel: “In the beginning, was the Word, and the Word was with God.” But then St. John takes it even further, clarifying why this personified wisdom was eternal, unlike the world

itself, which had a beginning in time, when he says: “and the Word was God.” The very wisdom behind God’s creation was actually a divine person, sharing fully the divine nature.

And then he announces that this divine Word “became flesh, and made his dwelling among us.” *This* is Jesus. The second person of the Holy Trinity, God’s own eternal and creative Word, who has loved us so much that in order to redeem this fallen world from the onslaught of evil and the tragedy of original sin he actually *enters into this world* to be our companion and our Savior, our Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

Throughout these lofty verses, St. John depicts the redemption as a new creation, a new expression of God’s power and love, and a new invitation to hear the divine word and so enter back into relationship with God, the only source of the “light and life” we long for.

In the next Meditation we will see what it looks like to welcome that invitation by reflecting on Christ’s initial encounter with his first disciples. But for now, let’s take some time, in the quiet of our hearts, to allow ourselves to be filled with wonder and awe at the goodness and power of God, who has not only created us for friendship with him, but also redeemed us from our rebellion against him.

QUESTIONS FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION/GROUP DISCUSSION

- I. 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



SECOND MEDITATION

The Master's Gaze



INTRODUCTION

The two creations we reflected on in the First Meditation are different in many ways. God created the universe by speaking his creative Word, but he redeemed the fallen human race by sending his Word among us, to dwell with us, to become one of us. The second creation, then, is much more intimate than the first.

But another difference is perhaps even more significant. Here is how St. Augustine expresses it: “God *created* us without us: but he did not will to *save* us without us.”

We were not consulted about our coming into existence. Our life, our existence, is a pure gift of God. He wants us to exist, and he gave us our existence.

But when it comes to our redemption, our recovering the communion with God in Christ that alone will give us the meaning and purpose we need to live a truly fulfilling life, we have a choice.

ACCEPTING AND REJECTING

St. John brings this out clearly in some more verses from the first Chapter of his Gospel, when he describes how the world responded to the incarnation of the Word of God:

“He [the Word of God] was in the world,
and the world came to be through him,
but the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own,
but his own people did not accept him.
But to those who did accept him he gave power

to become children of God, to those who believe in his name, who were born not by natural generation nor by human choice nor by a man's decision but of God.

—John 1:10–12

Jesus enters into our world, our lives, and we have two options: we can welcome him, or we can reject him. Many of Jesus' own contemporaries, his own people, rejected him. But some welcomed him, and they were redeemed, they entered into a new communion with God, becoming members of the divine family, sharers in the divine nature, "children of God."

Jesus continues entering into our lives, our worlds—this is why we celebrate Advent and Christmas year after year. He continues to invite us to follow him. He continues speaking words to our hearts so that we can grow in our relationship with him. And so we continue to have two options: to welcome him, or to reject him. The experience of the first two disciples who welcomed Jesus, who responded generously to his invitation, can help teach us to keep on responding generously too.

GOD'S PATIENCE AND PERSISTENCE

Let's listen to how John—one of these two disciples—describes this encounter with the Word of God who came to dwell among us:


“The next day John [the Baptist] was there again with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus walk by, he said, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” The two disciples heard what he said and followed

Jesus. Jesus turned and saw them following him and said to them, “What are you looking for?” They said to him, “Rabbi” (which translated means Teacher), “where are you staying?” He said to them, “Come, and you will see.” So they went and saw where he was staying, and they stayed with him that day. It was about four in the afternoon.

—John 1:37–39

John the Baptist had already pointed out Jesus to these two disciples the day before. That’s why this passage begins with the phrase, “the next day.” In other words, these disciples didn’t follow Jesus the first time he crossed their path. Jesus had to be patient and persistent with them. And he is patient and persistent with us too.

God will never give up on us. God understands that our human nature is wounded, that taking steps along the path of holiness and responding to his invitations is often difficult for us. That Jesus walked by these disciples “the next day” shows us this patience of God. He really wants us to continue following him, so he will continue inviting us. This is one of the manifestations of God’s mercy. As the Book of Lamentations puts it:

 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
they are new every morning;
great is thy faithfulness.

— Lamentations 3:22–23

RSVCE

GOD'S GENTLENESS

Then the Gospel tells us that “the two disciples heard what he said and followed Jesus.” This shows how gentle God is with us. Jesus himself is the Word of God, but he calls his first disciples indirectly, through the witness of John the Baptist. This contrasts with the dramatic theophanies of the Old Testament, where God addresses his people through fire and thunder, as when he gave Moses the Ten Commandments on Mt. Sinai. Jesus doesn't want to force his way into our lives; he wants us to choose to follow him; he wants a relationship with us.

But once these two disciples decide to set out after Jesus, the Lord senses their presence. The Gospel tells us: “Jesus turned and saw them following him, and said to them, ‘What are you looking for?’” Jesus turned towards them—he adjusted his position in order to encounter them. And then he “saw” them—the Greek verb used here implies an extended look, a gaze: Jesus takes a good long look at them, he gazed at them. Imagine how they felt under the gaze of God. Imagine the expression on Jesus's face as he met these two men who would become his close friends, his followers, and his Apostles.

GOD'S CHALLENGE

And then Jesus spoke to them. He asked them a question: “What are you looking for?” The word Jesus used implies an intense and intentional quest. In other places in the New Testament it is translated as “seek” or “search.” He wants to know what these two future disciples really want. Why are they following him?

It is a challenging question. It resounds in our own hearts too. What do we really want? What are we really looking for? Where are we hoping to find the happiness that we all desire? Jesus cares about our hearts, about healing them and filling them. And so his first words in the Gospel of John touch our hearts as he gazes into our eyes: “What are you seeking?”

THE COURAGEOUS RESPONSE

John and Andrew, these two disciples, give a curious answer. They say, “Rabbi, where are you staying?”

In a sense, they don’t really respond to his question. Maybe they were puzzled by it, or disconcerted, or just embarrassed.

But in another sense, this non-response was the absolutely perfect response. By calling him Rabbi, “Teacher,” they recognize his wisdom and show their willingness to learn, to follow him, to find their answers in him. And by asking where he is staying, they show their desire simply to be with him, to enter into a relationship with him.

We can easily imagine Jesus’s face breaking into a big smile as he responds by saying, “Come, and you will see.” Jesus opens his home to them, opens his heart to them, opens his mind to them. This is exactly why the Word became flesh, so as to “make his dwelling among us,” to be with us, to walk with us and invite us into his companionship.

THE NEXT STEP

John and Andrew had no idea what was beginning that day. They didn't know they were taking the first steps toward becoming saints and apostles, toward entering into a new depth of intimacy with God, toward growing in wisdom and grace and every virtue, toward truly seeing the world and themselves in an entirely new way, toward building a Church that would endure and grow for more two thousand years. *They* didn't know all that, but *Jesus* did.

Whenever Jesus crosses our path, catches our eye, and poses a new question to our hearts, it's always because he is leading us somewhere wonderful. And every liturgical season is, at the very least, a new invitation from the Lord. This Advent is no different.

In the Conference, we will contemplate how John the Baptist models the missionary dimension of our Christian vocation, but for now, let's take some time to prayerfully savor this beautiful, mysterious encounter between Jesus and his first disciples, and see what it says to our own hearts today.

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

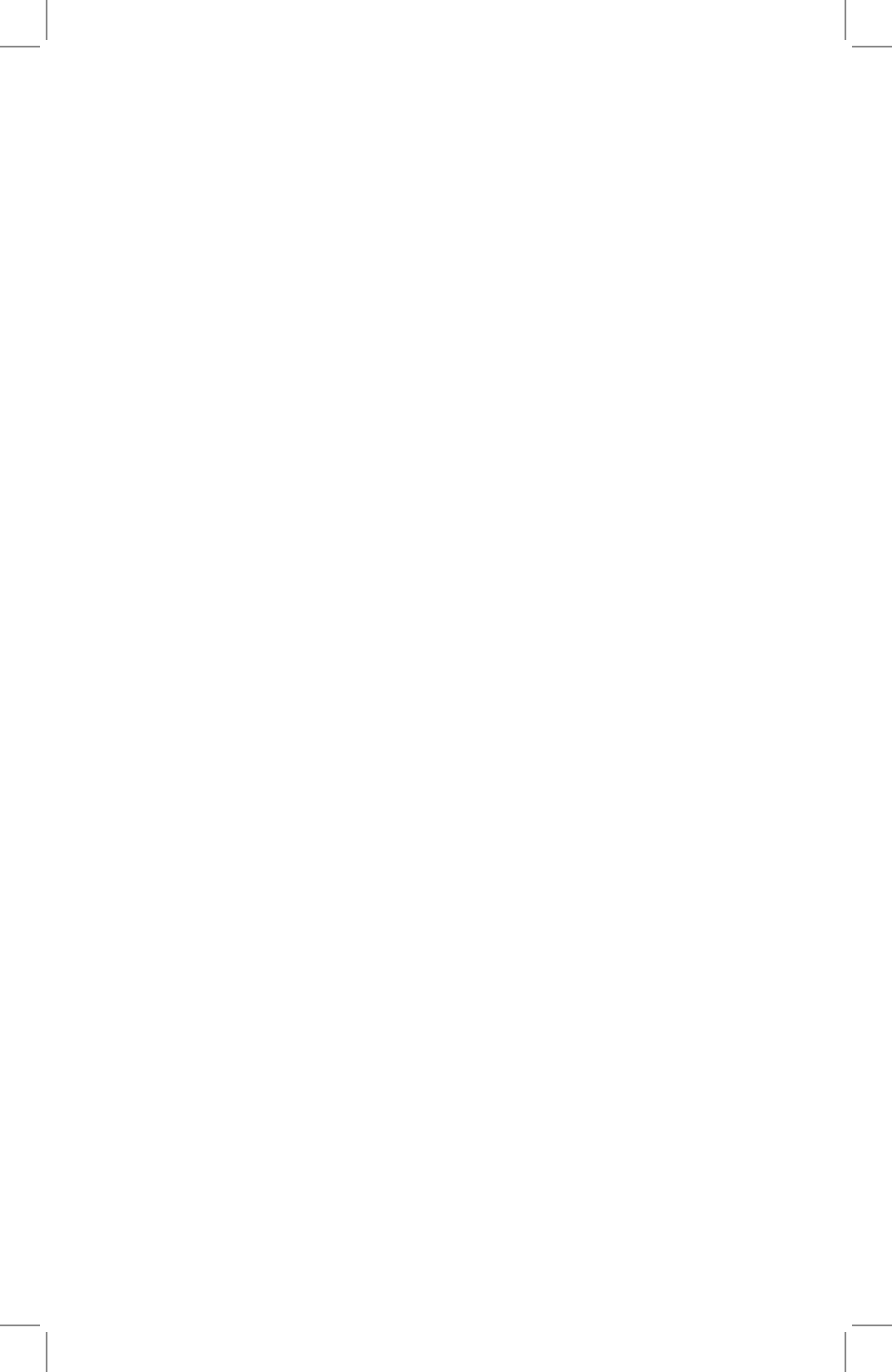
“Father,
I abandon myself into your hands;
do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me,
and in all your creatures —

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



CONFERENCE

*St. John the Baptist: Model of
a Missionary Disciple*



INTRODUCTION

Jesus came into the world to inaugurate a second creation, the redemption. And he redeems us by walking into our lives and lovingly inviting us to “come and see” where and how he lives, so that we—like his first disciples—can journey with him and come to share his wisdom, joy, and blessedness. This is the message of the gospel, a message the Church highlights anew every Advent and Christmas season.

In the Meditations of this Retreat Guide, we dug into some verses from John I that helped refresh our appreciation for those mysteries. But that same Chapter from John’s Gospel spotlights another New Testament figure who is also worth our reflection: John the Baptist.

WE ARE ALL MISSIONARIES

He is a major figure in all four Gospels, and a major figure throughout the season of Advent. He has a lot to say to us, because he was the very first Christian missionary, and every single one of us is also called to be a Christian missionary. In fact, being partners in spreading Christ’s Kingdom in the world touches the very core of our identity. Here is how St. John Paul II explained it:

“The mission of salvation is universal; for every person and for the whole person. It is a task which involves the entire People of God, all the faithful. Mission must therefore be the passion of every Christian; a passion for the salvation of the world

and ardent commitment to work for the coming of the Father’s kingdom.¹

Mission must be our passion; we must stir up an “ardent commitment”—a *heartfelt* commitment—to help spread Christ’s Kingdom.

This may seem intimidating. It may make us feel pressured. It may seem disconcerting. It may paralyze us with a fear of failure. After all, we have busy lives and already feel over-extended. Now we’re *also* supposed to go out and save the world? How is that supposed to happen? Isn’t that too much?

Not at all. It isn’t too much, and it doesn’t have to be intimidating or disconcerting or paralyzing. In fact, Christ’s decision to make us partners in his great task of evangelizing the world is meant to be a source of meaning, purpose, and joy, because we were actually created to make an everlasting impact on the world and those around us; we are wired for it. Here’s how Pope Francis explains it:

“When the Church summons Christians to take up the task of evangelization, she is simply pointing to the source of authentic personal fulfillment. For here we discover a profound law of reality: that life is attained and matures in the measure that it is offered up in order to give life to others. This is certainly what mission means.”²

St. John the Baptist was the first Christian Missionary, and his experience of living his mission can help us unlock

1 John Paul II, Message for World Mission Sunday, 9; October 24, 1999

2 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 10.

newfound joy and fruitfulness in living our own mission. That's what we will reflect on in this Conference.

Our reflections will flow from the verses in John 1 describing John the Baptist, and also from the insights of one of Europe's great artists, Titian, who painted a grand portrait of John the Baptist, when he was working in Venice in the sixteenth century.

SENT FROM GOD

In the prologue to his Gospel, John the Evangelist summarizes St. John the Baptist's mission like this:

“A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light.

—John 1:6–8

The first characteristic mentioned here is the most important: “A man named John was sent from God.” St. John the Baptist had been given his mission by God. He had been invited by God to play a role in the history of salvation, and he had been given the talents, circumstances, and opportunities necessary to fulfill that role.

The same can be said for each one of us. We each have a meaningful part to play in God's history of salvation. Each of us is called into existence by God, called to follow Christ, and invited to put our absolutely unique combination of gifts and experiences at the service of God and neighbor.

In Titian's painting, this "being sent from God" can be subtly seen in two characteristics. First, John the Baptist is shown wearing a simple, primitive garment. We know from the other Gospels that he lived in the wilderness, wore only a camel-hair tunic and leather belt, and subsisted on very meagre food—locusts and wild honey and nothing much more. In the painting, we see this tunic and the leather belt, and we see him barefoot. He almost looks like a caveman—simple, poor, unsophisticated. This poverty shows that his life is centered around God, and what matters to him is God, and what sustains him is God—nothing else, nothing merely human, not wealth or power or even his own great ideas and brilliant creativity. *God* is the one who has sent him on his mission; and so, he depends on God.

At the same time, Titian chooses to show John as a strong man, athletic and muscular. Yes, he is poor and detached from this world, but God has provided him with the strength and wisdom necessary for his demanding mission. His strong body and confident posture show that even in his poverty, God's providence has provided him with what he needs to fulfill that mission.

The same goes for us. Maybe we feel our limitations, our weaknesses, even our sinfulness. But none of that can impede us from finding and fulfilling our mission, if we lean on God and truly live from his will and for his Kingdom.

WITNESSING TO THE LIGHT

After asserting that he was "sent from God," the Gospel tells us what he was sent for: "He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but he came to testify to the light."

The Greek word for “testimony”, sometimes translated as “witness”, is “martyria”, which is also the root of our English word, “martyr.” John the Baptist bears witness to Christ, to the Savior, to the Light—even to the point of martyrdom—but he himself is not the Savior.

Titian shows this by depicting John the Baptist pointing and looking *away from himself*. He is pointing out Christ. The painting may indeed show the very moment when John the Baptist told John and Andrew about Jesus as Jesus was passing by: “... he looked at Jesus as he walked by and said, ‘Behold the Lamb of God.’”

Later in this same Chapter, John engages in a lengthy dialogue with some religious leaders sent from Jerusalem to investigate whether he was a real prophet or a fanatical heretic. In his conversation with the inquisitors, he repeatedly goes back to his core message. Here is how the Gospel records it:

“ And this is the testimony of John. When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites [to him] to ask him, “Who are you?” he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, “I am not the Messiah” ... So they said to him, “Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?” He said: “I am ‘the voice of one crying out in the desert, ‘Make straight the way of the Lord,’ as Isaiah the prophet said.”

—John 1:19–20, 23

They kept on pressing him, and he kept on pointing to Jesus, not to himself, bearing witness to Jesus, not to himself, trying to get them to look at Jesus and believe in *him*.

This is essential for us as well. We are called to be partners in building up Christ's Kingdom, but *he* is the Savior of the world, not us. We, like St. John the Baptist, are simply called to point to him—in our words, in our way of life and in our works. This is why St. Teresa of Calcutta was able to sum up the mission of every Christian simply by saying: “We are not called to be successful, we are called to be faithful.”

KNOWING JESUS WELL

John teaches us at least one more critical lesson for our lives as Christ's ambassadors in this fallen world. It comes out in how he describes who Jesus is:

“John answered them, “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.” ... The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, ‘A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.’”

—John 1:26, 29–30

John knows Jesus. He knows who Jesus is and why Jesus came. He knows Jesus' greatness and his divinity. He knows—personally, deeply, existentially—that Jesus is the Lord, the Messiah, the Lamb of God—the promised Savior who offers his own life to repair this world broken by sin.

Every day in the Temple, the Jewish priests would offer lambs in sacrifice, to atone for sins. And every Passover, a lamb would be sacrificed by every family, calling to mind the miraculous liberation from Egyptian slavery under Moses, during which the blood from the sacrificial lamb was rubbed on the doorposts of the Israelites in order to save them from the angel of death.

Jesus is the fulfillment of all the prophecies and types of the Old Testament. He is God with us, Emmanuel. And John knows this—through his own life of prayer, study, and sacrifice, he has been enlightened by God’s grace to truly know not just *about* Jesus, but to *know* Jesus.

Titian depicts this gently by showing a lamb at John’s feet, giving John a staff topped with a cross, and showing the Jordan River—so essential for Israel’s history—in the background.

We too need to know Jesus, if we are to be his witnesses in the world. We must become experts in Jesus, in his doctrine, in his goodness, in his friendship. This is the key to everything else. If we continue to grow in our personal knowledge of the Lord, spreading his Kingdom in society and being his witnesses—his martyrs—to those around us will flow as naturally as light shines out from a lantern.

John the Baptist, sent and equipped by God, given the mission of bearing witness to Christ, and faithful to that mission though his own personal knowledge of the Lord—that is an example for all of us. Let’s renew our desire to follow this example and fulfill our true mission in life. We may not see all the results we would expect in this life—after all, even St. John the Baptist ended up imprisoned and beheaded, hardly making him a case for

worldly success—but the results will come nonetheless, somehow, and we will not lose our reward. That, in fact, is what Jesus promised: “Everyone who acknowledges me before others I will acknowledge before my heavenly Father” (Matthew 10:32).

Take some time now to reflect on the questions in the personal questionnaire, designed to help you apply these gospel truths to your own life.

PERSONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

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

Please visit our website, *RCSpirituality.org*, for more spiritual resources, and follow us on Facebook for regular updates: *facebook.com/RCSpirituality*.

If you would like to support and sponsor a Retreat Guide, please consider making a donation at *RCSpirituality.org*.



Retreat Guides are a service of Regnum Christi.
RegnumChristi.org

Produced by Coronation Media.
CoronationMedia.com

Developed & Self-published by RCSpirituality.
RCSpirituality.org

