

St John the Baptist
(Isaiah 49:1-6 / Luke 1:57-66.80)
24.06.2018
Chosen & called

In our repertoire, one of the hymns for St John the Baptist has the following words:
“God called great prophets to foretell
The coming of his Son
The greatest called before his birth
Was John the chosen one.” (Stanbrook)

Called and chosen: these are two key words in order to understand John the Baptist’s life. In the preface which will be sung during our Eucharistic celebration, we will hear a third important word: consecrated. John the Baptist was called, chosen and consecrated.

All this is God’s action. John the Baptist did nothing to merit obtaining what we may consider as a particularly great privilege.

John the Baptist is not the only one to be called, chosen and consecrated. This feast is an opportunity for us to give thanks for the fact that God has personally called each one of us, chosen us and consecrated us. As we read in Scriptures: God “called us out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1P 2:9), “he chose us before the foundation of the world” (Ep 1:4).

Concretely what does that mean for us?

We may feel lonely, we may have experienced rejection, we may consider ourselves a failure, yet St John the Baptist stands in our midst as a reminder that our heavenly Father has chosen us as his or her beloved. He has elected us graciously in love and for love.

We have not been thrown into the world at whim, like bubbles blown into the air, without purpose and meaning. God called us personally by our name and opens up for us a path to follow, a life to live to the full.

St John the Baptist was able to get through all the difficult times of his life because he was standing on the sure ground of his election by God.

It is important to remember that St John the Baptist, the one who recognised Jesus as the Lamb of God and baptised him, is also the one who went through a time of doubt about the identity of Jesus. While in prison, he sent his disciples to Jesus with a question: “Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?” (Lk 7:19)

Maybe more than his death as a martyr, John the Baptist’s period of doubt should help us on our journey because, all of us, have been assailed by questions about God’s presence and plan for ourselves and for others.

In our Gospel reading, we are told that John the Baptist “grew and became strong in spirit”. John the Baptist’s strength had its roots in the fact that he trusted in the fidelity of God to his regard. Like his father Zechariah, he believed in the “tender mercy of God” (Lk 1:78) for him. Fears and uncertainties could not make him waver as he was deeply rooted in God’s call addressed to him: a call to be truly alive.

Very often I listen to young Christians who are trying to discern God’s plan for their lives and the danger for them is to become paralysed, afraid to make a mistake. God becomes a puppeteer in charge of our lives and of the universe. When this is how we perceive God to be then we are no longer chosen in order to live our lives in love and freedom but in order to live in fear and in blind obedience.

At the birth of John the Baptist, people wondered: “What will this child turn out to be?” This is a natural question which can apply to all new-born babies and which should remain always without an answer. Who knows what a baby will turn out to be?

In a way this question was also God’s question because while he had a plan for John the Baptist, he did not impose anything on him and left him free to make his own decisions. What is true for John the Baptist is true for each one of us. From our mothers’ wombs God pronounced our name, he chose us as his servants and yet his plan for us unfolds itself in dialogue with us, without imposing itself on us.

God does not call us without giving us what we need in order to answer his call.

God called, chose and consecrated John the Baptist for a particular mission. He calls you and me and consecrates us to serve him in a very personal and particular way. Bl. John Henry Newman sums up well what we mean when he writes: “All through our life, Christ is calling. He called us first in baptism; but afterwards also; whether we obey his voice or not. He graciously calls us still. He calls us from grace to grace, and from holiness to holiness, while life is given us.” (*Serm. VIII-2*, p. 1581); “God has committed some work to us which he has not committed to another. We have our mission. Somehow we are necessary for his purposes, as necessary in our place as an Archangel in his. We have a part in this great work; he has not created us for naught.” (*Meditations*, III)

As we deal with feelings of disappointment, discouragement or being lost, the way forward for us is to reconnect with a deep sense and awareness of our calling by God. A call which made us priests, prophets and kings. This is our dignity and our responsibility. In the Church, lay people and priests, we all have to exercise our role, to accomplish a mission. Like St John the Baptist, there will be times when we will see clearly and “rejoice greatly at the bridegroom’s voice” (Jn 3:29), and there will be times when we will struggle and doubt.

At the moment, here in Ireland and in our diocese of Dromore, we are certainly in a time of crisis. In order to be able to move on, it is important to acknowledge that we are going through a difficult time, yet it is also important to go back to what is essential: the personal call that God addressed to each one of us and the assurance of his presence by our side.

God has not created us for naught, he called us out of love and chose us “to be the light of the nations so that his salvation may reach to the ends of the earth”.