



Conference 4 | Saints Preparing for His Coming

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Let us ask for the intercession of our Lady as we pray:

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with Thee. Blessed art thou among women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[0:40] So friends in Christ we're in the middle of the Advent season, a week or two into the Advent season, and so we remember that in the Advent season the church offers to us a number of images. And I'd like to share with you one of the images that she offers to us today. And that is the image of Saint John the Baptist, beautiful icon from my vicar, my Cathedral of Saint John the Baptist. So this is the icon that the church offers to us today, and especially throughout the Advent season. The person of Saint John the Baptist, and I'm going to come back to this at the very end.

[1:25] So, if we think about the Advent season: the Advent season is a time in which we look toward two comings: first of all, we look toward the coming that's already taken place in time, that's the birth of our Savior, the Christmas time. That's what we celebrate, not just for a day, but also through the octave, and also through the Christmas season, which already has taken place in time. And that makes perfect sense: we do that with our birthdays, we do that with anniversaries, we do that with important dates. But what more important day is there than the birth of our Lord? **Because of the birth of our Lord we have the fullness of time.** And so we look toward that day, every year so we are preparing our hearts in order to celebrate our Lord's birth. But there's also the second coming we look toward. And the second coming is the one that our Lord promised that He would come back. And when He comes, all will be placed under His authority, and we will have what we say in the Creed, we will have the resurrection of our bodies. In other words, our bodies will be united with our souls, and we get a glimpse of that when we talk about the assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary who was assumed into heaven, body and soul. So, there's these two comings that we look toward. And in both cases we want to make sure that when the Lord does come, whether it is for the celebration of His birth, whether is the second coming, that He finds us **good faithful servants: ready, watching and waiting.** Ready, watching and waiting.

[3:00] And as I said, the icon that we have today is the icon of Saint John the Baptist. So, think about the person of John the Baptist: we know that he was a prophet; he was, we can say, the last of the Old Testament prophets, and the first of the New Testament prophets because we know that our Lord is the dividing line between the Old and the New Testament. Well, he was the last of the Old Testament, and he was the first of the New Testament. And what Scriptures say about him in Mathew's gospel, chapter 11, verse 11, that there was 'no man born, greater born of woman', 'no man greater born of woman'. Sometimes people ask me about this, this question: "Why is that? Why is John the Baptist considered the one who is the greatest born among the women?". And the simple answer is because of his role, of who he was, being that prophet. We think about, 'What is a prophet?'. **A prophet is someone who is a mouthpiece for God, someone who speaks the prophetic word; someone who speaks on behalf of God.** That's what a prophet was. And John the Baptist was a prophet in the truest sense because not only did he speak on behalf of God, but he pointed toward God, right? 'Behold



the Lamb of God', right? 'There is Jesus Christ, the One that we have long for all this time'. So, a prophet is somebody who will speak on behalf of God, and be that mouthpiece of God. And sometimes the things that a prophet has to say, sometimes they are difficult, and sometimes they could be words of great comfort. We think about the words that we hear mostly during Advent from the prophet Isaiah. He's speaking these words to people who are in exile. So when Israel... whenever they went into exile, there was this heavy burden that was laid upon them: not only were they captives, not only were people harmed, physically harmed and even some put to death, but you know, when they are in exile, they are out of the land, and remember, the land is the physical reminder of who they are, 'cause God gave them the land. And it was a physical reminder **'We are His people, He is our God'**. So they are out of the land, and because of that, also that they are not able to worship God freely as they are called to worship Him freely, you know, and keep holy, holy the sabbath. And then also they are in an alien land too. So all this heavy burden that is placed upon them. So you can imagine when they are in this exile, that many people wanted to give up hope. And that's where the prophet comes in, that's when Isaiah comes in, when he speaks these words of comfort to the people, to lift their spirits, to give them joy, to know that the words don't simply come from Isaiah, but the words come from God. And that's what it meant to be a prophet, to speak a prophetic word, to be that mouthpiece, that instrument of God. In this case, to give comfort for the people. And that's the theme that we hear throughout the season of Advent, one word of comfort. But we also know that at times the prophets had some pretty difficult or hard things to say to the people. Many times, 'Why are they in exile?' They are in exile because they were not being faithful to God and you can say it was almost like a holy timeout, you know, if your children were being bad... I wish, I wish there was timeout when I was growing up, that seems like an easy one, but I think I spent most of my junior high years being grounded, but, uh, you know, that's a little timeout, ok, when you're going to take time out and you're going to think about what you did wrong, and that's what many times God did with the people when they were unfaithful. And, so... you know, we think about a prophet like Jeremiah, we think about a prophet like Elijah... there are some really hard things, some hard sayings to share with the people... and essentially at the heart of it was 'You are not living your life, the life that you were called to live because of who you are. Who are you? You are God's people! How are you to live? You are to live by His commands'. And so, the prophets had to say some very, very difficult things to the people. And as we know, it wasn't always easy on the prophets. Many times people... they wanted to exile them, they wanted to put them to death... they understood this was their mission, this was who they were. They were prophets called to share the good news, even if it was difficult, it was the good news.

[7:41] We also can know that the prophets... sometimes the prophet can be a reluctant prophet, and when I think about that I think about someone like Jonah: Jonah was told to go to Nineveh, and to preach repentance to the people. And Jonah was a reluctant, he was a reluctant person, right? What did he do? He tried to flee from this, and we know all the stories about Jonah... I think probably the people that captured it the best are VeggieTales. VeggieTales tell the story so well, not just if you are a little one, but for everyone. It's pretty creative and fairly entertaining but they tell the story pretty well. But, uh, he tried to run! He tried to run from that and we know that he couldn't run from it. And so, he was a bit fearful, and so, what did he need? He needed to have that fear transformed into an act of love. He really needed to have a courageous heart and be able to share this difficult news with the people. Now, we know what happened to the people of Nineveh: they received the message when Jonah preached it to them, and eventually they were... they were converted! And so, uh, you know, that was the role of the prophet there, even a reluctant prophet such as Jonah.



[9:03] So, John the Baptist: what sort of prophet was John the Baptist? John the Baptist as Scriptures say, second Sunday, was the voice of the one crying out in the desert, and was he out in the desert crying out on his own accord? No, he was not crying out on his own accord, he wasn't pointing towards himself. And so, I think that's also another thing about the prophet: the prophetic word that he speaks is not a word from him or a word about him, **but rather the prophetic word that he speaks is a word from God, and it's a word about God.** Whether, you know, to follow God, to conform your life, whatever the case might be, that's what Saint John the Baptist was doing, the last of the Old, the first of the New Testament... he was out and he was not pointing towards himself, but rather he was pointing towards the Messiah. And that's precisely what he did, he pointed toward the Messiah, that was the good news that he had to share with the people, 'Behold! The Lamb of God; behold Him! He is the One that takes away the sins of the world. The baptism I'm giving you... that's just a repentance from sin, but the baptism He will be giving you will be one with the Holy Spirit'. And, uh, and so, you hear him say these powerful words, and they really are words that lift up the spirit, lift the spirit of the people, because when he is pointing towards Jesus and is identifying Him as the Lamb of God, he is appointing Him as the Messiah, the people would recognize 'This is the One! This is the One whom our heart long, we desired to see all this time, He is the One who would truly release us from our captivity!'. Now, for some people they thought that captivity was more like a military leader or King, in that sense. But we know that what He was going to do was to release them from the captivity that held all men captive, and that being the captivity of sin, and death, and was ultimately going to, by His passion, His suffering, death and resurrection. So he have good news to share with the people, but he also had some very, very difficult news that got him into hot waters and ultimately, he ultimately lost his life for. And that was when he was calling Herod and Herodias, was calling them out on their illegitimate wedding, on their illegitimate marriage. And it got him into hot water, and eventually it got him where he lost his head and so he became a martyr, he suffered a martyr's death. So, sometimes the words that a prophet has to speak, they are not always easy to say and people don't always receive them well. But the prophet understands that sometimes has to speak those difficult words. And we see that in the life of Saint John the Baptist: sharing good news, sharing difficult words, but um, sharing words that were necessary. Really living up to that role of who he was called to be. And then, um, and then finally, you know, again, **a prophet doesn't point towards himself;** he did not point himself, he did not say 'Behold the Lamb of God'. He said 'No, Lo, behold the Lamb of God, HE is the one taking away the sins of the world'. And what I would like to say about John the Baptist, he has what I call the '**unofficial prayer of Saint John the Baptist**' and there're his words when he points to Jesus and says '**I must decrease in order that He must increase**'. In another word, a prophet doesn't point towards himself because he speaks on his own behalf; he speaks on behalf of God, he points toward God, and that's what he is doing right here, he is pointing towards Jesus Christ, who is truly God and truly man... 'I must decrease in order that He must increase'. 'I must decrease in order that He must increase'. So, I think, powerful, powerful words that come to us.

[13:04] So let's think about ourselves: we are all baptized Christians. When we are baptized we are made new creations in Christ, the stain of our original sin is removed, we are able to call God our Father in the midst of the worshipping community. These are all privileges that we have, these are our gifts to us by God. Following our baptism, what we are is we are anointed, are anointed with sacred chrism, same chrism, that's the same oil that is used to anoint somebody when they are confirmed; is the same chrism that is anointed on the priest's hands when he's ordained; is the same chrism that is poured over a bishop's head when he is ordained... you can imagine on my head... it just run and run and run... but is that anointing. And t he anointing is there to send someone on a mission, and the mission that we are set on when we are baptised, is that we are anointed priest, prophet and king, you know, we are



anointed priest, prophet and king by virtue of our baptism because we are conformed to Jesus Christ is a special way, we have this particular character that will be with us for the rest of our lives. Thank God!

[14:30] So think about the word 'prophet': what is a prophet? Again, a prophet is someone who serves as a mouthpiece for God; someone who does not speak on his own behalf. It's someone who shares good news with people. It's also someone that might have to speak a difficult, a difficult prophetic word with others. And then also is somebody who, at times, might not feel like doing it, might be a little reluctant like that I mentioned, like Jonah, but we are all called to live that prophetic role in our lives. So, what does that might look like? What does that might look like in our lives because of our baptism? To speak a prophetic word, how is it that I can speak prophetic word? I would say an easy way to speak a prophetic word is this: To know my Bible, and to know my Catechism. To know my Bible and to know my Catechism. And also to say, if someone gives me a question that i don't have, to be able to say, 'Let me get back to you on that; or Let me take a look in the bible. Let's look for the Word in the Bible" or 'Let's look at the Catechism and see what the church teaches on that"'. Because we can say is that, **what is revealed to us in Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition is true.** So, if we are able to share that, right? this is being revealed to us as God, we are able to share that we are doing this, we are sharing the good news of God. Again, we would not point to ourselves, but we would point to the One who has the power to save. And so we can do that by sharing our prophetic word with people. And sometimes that prophetic word can come out in different ways, sometimes people might be grieving, they might be suffering, they might be searching, and if we are able to share that good news with them we can lift their spirits, right? we can lift their spirits. Sometimes the things that we have to share with people are difficult, right, as I mentioned, with somebody like Elijah or Jeremiah or John the Baptist with Herod and Herodias, but we have to make sure that we are also men and women of courageous hearts. And to have courageous hearts means to act out of love, it really, it truly means to desire the good for the other. And so, in this world right now where we live in the middle of a culture of death, we have to speak that prophetic word, and for many people that's a difficult saying. When we have to talk about things that are intrinsically evil, meaning an act that is always wrong, things such as abortion, that the obvious one, right? Euthanasia, another obvious one. A one that should be obvious but maybe is not so obvious to all of us, but... and that is contraception. Contraception is completely against God's law, and is an act that is always wrong. And if you are looking for a good source to understand that, and understand that well, read the short little Encyclical from Pope Saint Paul VI 'Humane Vitae', it's beautiful, beautifully written. And you can look at the writings of Pope Saint John Paul II 'Theology of the body' for some really, really good resources out there to introduce us to those things. But those can be, those can be some hard sayings, those can be hard sayings, and, when we share them with people, we wanna make sure that we are sharing them, and we are doing them out of love.

[17:55] Saint Paul says in 1 Corinthians, chapter 13 in the beginning, he said, when he talks about love he says: 'Love is always other seeking, right, is not jealous, right? is all these different things, is always other seeking, is kind, is patient, is all these good things... what love always desires is, love always desires the good of the other person. So for sharing, whether is something that is really easy and super, super good news, or we are sharing still good news but one of the hard sharings, we wanna make sure that we are doing it, and we are doing it out of love, we have to be doing it out of love. We always want to check; 'Is this something I'm doing out of love... OR... I'm I just doing this to kind of win an argument, or dismiss this person, or win the day, or leave this person in a puddle of himself...?'. If that's my intention, I'm not doing it out of love, and what does Paul say? Paul says 'If I have no love, I'm a noisy gong and a clanging cymbal, meaning that the good news is going to go nowhere, because the good news is something like a noisy gong clanging cymbals, you want to cover your ear, you don't want to



hear that. And that's how we can come across if we are not prophetically speaking out of love, if we are not prophetically speaking out of love. So that always has to be at the foundation of everything, everything that we do. It has to be out of love. We can be reluctant too, it can be really hard to say something like, you know, 'contraception is wrong', you know? 'That's not what the church teaches, that is wrong'. But if we say it out of love, then we can feel good that we are doing not our own, you know, our own bidding, we are not pointing to ourselves, but we are doing the bidding of our Lord, speaking the prophetic Word, and we are sharing that good news, that good news that many people need to hear in our world now more so than ever.

[19:58] As I said, John the Baptist is a beautiful example of that. In that unofficial prayer of John the Baptist, 'I must decrease in order that He must increase', what he models for us is the virtue of humility. Humility is understanding who I am in relationship to God, and to my neighbor. **So humility is understanding who I am, in relationship to God, and to my neighbor.** In our world today I think there's all sorts of different identifiers, people use all sorts of different identifiers to say 'I am this... I'm that... I'm this ethnicity... I come from this family... I come from this clan... I come from this city... this state... this country...' all these different things that people use as their different identifiers. And these are true... and they are good... they can be, they can be very helpful... But really, **the most important identifier that we all have is this: we are all a child of God.** That's by far THE most important identifier. We are all a child of God. So it talks about that relationship that each one of us has with our loving God, right? I'm a child of God, that's who I am. **I am a beloved son, I'm a beloved daughter of God the Father by virtue of my baptism,** that's who I am. And out of that identity comes, specially what we are talking about, comes that prophetic role. And that prophetic role is to speak the good news in good times, in bad times, in season and out of season. But when we do it, it means that we always have to do it out of love because if we don't speak out of love, what happens brothers and sisters is, we lose our right to speak ('noisy gong, clanging cymbal'). But we wanna make sure that we always, always do that, speaking out of love.

Saint John the Baptist did this, he wasn't a reluctant prophet, all right? but he said good things, always good things, he said things that were pleasing to people's ears but he said also things that were not so pleasing to people's ears, he was calling them back to God, calling them for repentance, and that's the rule of the prophet.

[22:22] As I said, I wanted to come back to this at the very end. This is a beautiful image of Saint John the Baptist, and when they (this is an icon); and when they talk about an icon, they say that **an icon is a window into Heaven.** So an icon is a window into Heaven. And you might say, 'Well, that's interesting...'. Well, think about this: when we see the icon in this beautiful image of Saint John the Baptist, and here we have our Lord, but we see that beautiful image of Saint John the Baptist, we look at him, we're automatically reminded about him, and we think, where is it? Where is he? And we know where he is, right? He is in heaven. He is in heaven with our Lord, he is in heaven with our Lady, he is in heaven with all the saints, and so when we gaze into an icon in a prayerful manner, when we do this, we gain a glimpse into heaven because we know this is where he is special, special saint we talk right now... this is where he is. And so, what this also reminds us of, is this: that we are able to ask him for his prayers, because he is around God, and he's seeing the glory of God, and we are in communion with him because all those who are in Christ, we are alive in Christ and are in communion with Him, and we can ask for his prayers. And you know, as our theme goes, 'an imitator of me, in as much as I am an imitator of Jesus Christ'. And what's the virtue we look at in the life of Saint John the Baptist? It was his role as a courageous prophet, saying things to people that needed to hear, sometimes the easy things,



sometimes the difficult things, but things that people needed to hear, not pointing toward himself, but again, pointing toward the Lord. And modeling that virtue of humility that we can all use to grow in.

[24:17] Final word, and this comes from a different saint: Saint Bernard of Clairvaux. When he was asked ‘What’s the most important... the three most important virtues in the life of a Christian?’, and **Saint Bernard of Clairvaux** simply said, ‘**The three most important virtues in the life of the Christian are humility, humility, humility**’, right? It’s not about me, it’s about understanding who I am in relationship to God, and in relationship to others, and how does it live out in our role as prophets? It means we point toward God, we mean, we speak about God not on our own behalf, we don’t point toward ourselves, but is all about God. And that was what we saw in the life of Saint John the Baptist who said ‘I must decrease in order that He must increase’.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

Saint John the Baptist, pray for us.