**HOMILY OF MOST REV BARRY JAMES HICKEY**

**ON THE**

**FEAST OF ST JOHN THE BAPTIST**

**20 OCTOBER 2011**

**AT THE BASILICA OF ST JOHN LATERAN**

In the history of salvation God called extraordinary people to proclaim his revelation to the world. Patriarchs and prophets prepared the Chosen People, the Israelites, to grasp the reality of the one true God and to shape their lives according to his Will.

On the Feast of St John the Baptist we see in him the fulfilment of the centuries of preparation and the validation of all that had gone before. We hear in him the combined voices of all the prophets as he cried out “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight His paths”.

He was the one chosen to announce that the time had finally come for all the prophecies to be fulfilled. He was the one of all the prophets chosen to say: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.”

The world was to know from John the Baptist that the Messiah was already among us.

John the Baptist also announced that the way to recognise the Lamb of God was through a personal conversion, away from sin and open to God. His baptism of water was a clear sign of this.

Having announced the coming of the Saviour Messiah, his work was done. Soon he would fall victim to those who would not change their lives and who demanded his. The public life of St John the Baptist was brief, but it shone like a beacon of blazing light, calling us to turn back to God, to do penance for our sins and receive the one that God had sent, Jesus the Christ, the straps of whose sandals he was not worthy to loose.

Despite his brief life Jesus called him the greatest to have been born of woman. Such praise for the man whose life was lived in obscurity and ascetic preparation for his noble task!

What do we make of St John the Baptist’s call today?

It is twofold.

Firstly, it is a call to us to examine the way we are living to see if we have truly accepted Jesus the Lamb of God by a deep and ongoing conversion of heart.

Even though we may have been Christian all our lives since our baptism, the ways of the world can so easily and so unobtrusively dull our enthusiasm to follow the Lord, or cloud our vision of a life offered to God, or slow our attempts to truly follow Him.

This Feast of St John the Baptist offers us the opportunity of an honest self-examination and a new start.

This personal renewal at depth is for everyone who seeks to follow Christ. One could say that it is even more important for those chosen to offer leadership to others as Bishop of the Church, to be not only teachers of the truth but clear examples and witnesses of that Truth. Our people deserve at least that. Furthermore the world needs that clear proclamation from us of the person of Jesus Christ and his message of salvation.

This is a message that John the Baptist offers us during our *Ad Limina* visit to the Holy Father.

The Baptist’s call is not only for our personal conversion, it challenges us to take up that same call and proclaim it to the world.

We are to be as courageous as John the Baptist in our call for the conversion of the world. No-one else can take up the call except those whom the Lord has chosen for the task.

Therefore all leaders of the Church who are anointed to preach must challenge the world to abandon its evil ways and turn back to God. We must not allow to go unchallenged the violence that has gripped the world, the destruction of lives through the drug trade, the exploitation of children and women in pornography and prostitution, the callous disregard for human life in abortion, and every other practice that is an offence against God. This will often require the fearlessness of John the Baptist who lost his own life because he condemned the immorality of powerful figures.

Much time has been spent in this *Ad Limina* visit in trying to understand the missionary call of the Church to today’s world. John the Baptist has reminded us that evil must be confronted as part of the spreading of the Gospel. Let us heed his words today.

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