

## **“HE MUST INCREASE, I MUST DECREASE.”**

### **FOSTERING A SPIRIT OF SERVICE**

Some people wonder why the Birth of John the Baptist is observed liturgically, even on a Sunday. It has to do with the fact that the prophecy of St. John the Baptist is so intimately linked to the mystery of the Incarnation, that it is classified as a Solemnity, and is observed on a fixed date, June 24th. It is even a holiday in some countries. Solemnities take precedence over Sundays of Ordinary Time, so **once every seven years** we are privileged to commemorate this great event within the context of the Sunday Mass. The Feast has been observed on this date for many centuries, and has its own Vigil Mass on Saturday evening, with separate readings and prayers. John the Baptist pointed towards another. His whole life witnessed to this reality, yet without losing his own personality, or in any way diminishing his person.

St. Augustine even found the date of this feast significant. He wrote: “So let both their deaths also speak of these two things: ‘It is necessary for him to grow, but for me to diminish.’ The one grew on the Cross, the other was diminished by the sword. Their deaths have spoken of this mystery, let the days do so too. Christ is born, and the days start increasing; John is born, and the days start diminishing. So, **let man’s honor diminish, God’s honor increase**, so that the honor of man may be found in the honor of God.” (Sermon # 380) The example of St. John the Baptist is truly one of selfless service. He desired to draw attention, not to himself, but to another. Service in the Church is both the fifth Precept of the Church (“You shall help to provide for the needs of the Church.”) as well as an invitation. It ought not to be seen primarily as a duty, but first and foremost as a loving response to faith. **Service to others** is a loving response to our own humanity, seeing the eyes of the Lord in others.

Did you know that each Wednesday, a small but dedicated group remains after the 5:15 p.m. Mass to sweep in between the pews? It takes approximately 20-30 minutes, and these people do it without fanfare or any expectation of recognition, but because they want to help. Every Monday morning an extremely dedicated group of volunteers meets to count the Sunday stewardship collection, a laborious process. Individuals have “adopted” chapels, gathering with their cleaning materials to clean walls, dust and assist with the care of the marble. Check out the roses planted by the flagpole— do you think they water themselves? The **list goes on and on**. Lectors practice their readings, choir members rehearse each Wednesday evening, catechists prepare lessons. All of this is vital to the life of this parish, and I am humbled, truly humbled to witness your dedication throughout the year. My thanks, though inadequate, is absolutely necessary. I am delighted to honor our volunteers today after the 10:00 a.m. Mass.

### **Immigration Reform**

I recall the summer of 2005 when I arrived in Rome for graduate studies. I had meticulously completed scores of paperwork prior to touchdown at Fiumicino airport, including obtaining a study visa through the Italian Consulate in Chicago. Still, upon arrival at the Casa Santa Maria (residence for U.S. priests studying abroad), we were told in very clear terms that **within eight days** of our arrival (tick-tock, tick-tock), we needed to present ourselves in person at the Questura (Police headquarters) to obtain a *permesso di soggiorno* (a residence permit) which would be attached to our Visa in our passports. For most of us, it was the first time we would be “on our own” to speak Italian and engage the local authorities. It was viewed by the returning student priests as a bit of a “rite of passage” for the new men as they initiated studies in a foreign nation.

I distinctly remember my experience, trying to figure out in which line I would stand, how I would explain myself in my broken Italian, and wondering if there would be any problems. It all went relatively smoothly, other than a number of others budging the line, and my prudent decision not to make an issue out of it. Frankly, I had not learned yet how to yell at someone in Italian, even had I wanted to do so! To be crystal clear, I am neither comparing my experience nor my situation to someone crossing a border illegally—it is clearly a case of apples and oranges. However, I cannot even begin to imagine the anxiety a child would experience upon separation from a mother after being detained in a facility just across the U.S. border.

USCCB President Cardinal DiNardo wrote: “Our government has the discretion in our laws to ensure that young children are not separated from their parents and exposed to irreparable harm and trauma. Families are

the foundational element of our society and they must be able to stay together. While protecting our borders is important, we can and must do better as a government, and as a society, to find other ways to ensure that safety.” On Wednesday afternoon, the President signed an Executive Order to ensure that families stay intact at the border. May both parties of Congress be motivated to pursue **comprehensive immigration reform**, assigning it the highest priority. There are substantial, but **not insurmountable** differences. Please Lord, may Congress just get it done!

- Time marches forward...Only **8 living bishops** (retired) remain who participated in all four sessions of Vatican II (1962-65), two of whom are Americans (Raymond Hunthausen, retired Archbishop of Seattle) and William McNaughton (retired missionary bishop in South Korea). An additional thirteen living bishops remain who attended at least one of the four sessions.
- Teenagers beware...the World Health Organization has officially listed **“gaming disorder”** as a mental health condition, behavior resulting in “significant impairment in personal, family, social, educational, occupational or other important areas of functioning”. While acknowledging that it “affects only a small proportion of people” who play video games, the concern is well worth noting for parents. My unsolicited parental advice—teach them to play Cribbage!
- As a college seminarian, I was introduced to an early second century Church Father named **St. Ignatius of Antioch**. I found his wisdom irresistible, practical and inspiring. From his Letter to Polycarp 3,1: “Do not let yourself be upset by those who seem to be very reliable and yet put forward strange teachings. Stand your guard, like an anvil under the hammer. The mark of a good athlete is to win despite taking blows. Accept trials of all kinds for God’s sake and we will be accepted by Him. Be even more diligent than you are now.”
- It was a joy to spend a little time with our Children’s choristers. Many thanks to **Jayne Windnagel** for her hard work in organizing the camp once again. While touring the Sacred Heart Chapel, I was asked some excellent questions, and came away encouraged by their inquisitiveness and love of both sacred music and their faith. When reminding the kids to display their nametags so I could see them clearly, I had to chuckle at the boy who promptly (and mischievously) clipped his nametag to the hair on the crown of his head.

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,  
Rector