



# Bringing Home the Word

Nativity of St. John the Baptist | June 24, 2018

## God's Calling for Us

By Janel Esker

Expectant parents the world over have one task in common—naming their newborns. Some mothers-to-be have kept a list of favorite baby names since adolescence. Other parents can't imagine naming their child until they lay eyes on their little one after birth. Some survey friends and family. My four-year-old nephew Alexander proclaimed that if his cousin-to-be was a girl, she should obviously be named Pizzahead. We thanked him and noted we would take his suggestion under, uh, consideration.

People often have much to say, sometimes quite vehemently, about the choice of a baby's name. It was no different for John the Baptist's mother. When Elizabeth announced that his name would be John, the name given him by the angel Gabriel, neighbors protested that this wasn't a family name and it couldn't possibly be appropriate. But his father, Zechariah, confirmed this heavenly chosen name. Word spread quickly of something quite special, even divine, about this child. Everyone wondered what he would become.

We know indeed what John became—the herald of Jesus' coming. Particularly special about John was his willingness to embrace his calling while recognizing that his mission was not about himself; rather, it was to direct others toward Jesus. He confidently claimed his vocation, but he was humble enough to know his life wasn't about himself.

Whether your name is John, Mary, or even Pizzahead, God has a calling for each of us—but it isn't about promoting ourselves or our needs. It's ultimately for the service of the Lord.

Are *we* strong enough to claim our calling—and humble enough to serve? +

## Sunday Readings

### Isaiah 49:1–6

Before birth the LORD called me, from my mother's womb he gave me my name.

### Acts 13:22–26

[John said,] "Behold, one is coming after me; I am not worthy to unfasten the sandals of his feet."

### Luke 1:57–66, 80

Immediately his mouth was opened, his tongue freed, and he spoke blessing God.

## A Word From Pope Francis

Our mission [is] to identify the material and immaterial needs of the people and try to meet them as we can. Do you know what *agape* is? It is love of others, as our Lord preached. It is not proselytizing, it is love. Love for one's neighbor, that leavening that serves the common good.

—Interview with *La Repubblica*, October 1, 2013



## REFLECTION QUESTIONS

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- Do I have a strong sense of God's mission for my life? What might be some of the elements?
- How have I benefited from other people who have been generous with their own mission?



# Ours Is a We Religion

By Fr. Thomas Richstatter, OFM

One reason I am Catholic is because Catholicism is a healthy corrective to the way I would prefer to live and pray. Catholicism is a *we* religion, about community.

Why do I consider Catholicism a healthy corrective? Here's an example: Three times a week I go to the gym for an aerobics class. When the alarm rings in the morning, I'd much rather stay in bed, but I'm convinced that, even though I don't like it, exercise is more healthy than sitting in front of the computer all day, typing with one hand and eating with the other. And just as the gym is an antidote to my inactivity and overeating, Catholicism is a healthy corrective for my American individualism.

There are many wonderful things about living in America. But besides being the land of the free and home of the brave, America is also the land of the "Lone Ranger." Americans love our individual freedom and independence—not only in the way we live, but also in the way we worship.

Studies show that Americans, regardless of their religious denomination, like to be independent in their beliefs: I decide what I want to believe, and how to pray. Identifying with an established denomination (Catholic, Presbyterian, Baptist, and so forth) is not important

for most Americans, who tend to move easily from one church to another. Conversion and salvation are understood as deeply personal, individual experiences. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, / That saved a wretch like me! / I once was lost, but now am found; / Was blind but now I see." Yes, American religion is about *I, me, and my*.

## Community: The Heart of It

Our religion is a healthy corrective to the excess individualism of American religion because Catholic identity is essentially collective. All of our official Catholic prayers are first-person plural: *we, us, and our*. At Mass we pray: "Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.... Grant that we, who are nourished by his body and blood, may be filled with his Holy Spirit, and become one body, one spirit in Christ" (Eucharistic Prayer III).

Family and community are at the heart of our Catholic identity because the very God we worship is a triune community of love: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The principal petition at every Eucharist is not for some individual gift of grace but for the gift of unity, the grace to become one body, one spirit in Christ. We pray that we become family, community, and Church.

## Jesus' Mission—and Ours

As Christ's Body the Church, we together are to continue Christ's mission to the world. It is not about what I want, but what Christ, in his body the Church, wants. Together with the whole Church we pray: *Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.*

Personally, I don't always find this community aspect of Catholicism comfortable. Often I would rather pray how I want. I get upset when community needs disturb the way I have always prayed. Why do I have to listen to the Bible proclaimed in Spanish at Mass just because the neighborhood is changing? I like to sing but I am not comfortable singing a hymn in Korean.

But in a deeper place, I want to welcome and be considerate of my sisters and brothers because I know that what is most comfortable for me isn't always what is best for my growth. It's more comfortable to stay in bed than to get up and exercise. I realize when I need a healthy corrective. +



Lord, you are always near.  
Deepen my faith in your  
goodness and love  
so I may be a sign of faith.

From *Faithful Meditations  
for Every Day in Ordinary Time*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage  
and Mary Ann McSweeney

## WEEKDAY READINGS

June 25–30, 2018

Monday, Weekday:  
2 Kgs 17:5–8, 13–15a, 18 / Mt 7:1–5

Tuesday, Weekday: 2 Kgs 19:9b–11,  
14–21, 31–35a, 36 / Mt 7:6, 12–14

Wednesday, Weekday:  
2 Kgs 22:8–13; 23:1–3 / Mt 7:15–20

Thursday, St. Irenaeus:  
2 Kgs 24:8–17 / Mt 7:21–29

Friday, Sts. Peter and Paul: Acts 12:1–11 /  
2 Tm 4:6–8, 17–18 / Mt 16:13–19

Saturday, Weekday:  
Lam 2:2, 10–14, 18–19 / Mt 8:5–17