



authorities, encouraged his listeners to recognise and abandon their sinful ways and, in baptism, had a simple way of helping people to feel good about themselves. Most people who saw and heard John the Baptist were impressed by him. Countless individuals would have marked him as a friend on the first-century equivalent of Facebook. It would have been so easy to take all the glory to himself.

Yet this was not what John wanted – and it was this humility and openness that allowed him to recognise Jesus as the one for whom he had been preparing the way. Now he would step back.

TRUE GREATNESS

Today's Gospel suggests that John might not have seen the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus in the form of a dove. He might not have heard the heavenly voice declare, "You are my Son, the Beloved." The Gospel says that these events happened after Jesus' baptism, while Jesus was at prayer. It doesn't say that John was at his side, searching for a selfie with Jesus.

It makes sense, doesn't it? Truly great people don't look for personal glory or boast of their achievements. Instead, they see beyond themselves to God, the real source of greatness. Even Jesus talked more about his Father than about himself. What about me? Where do I stand?

Mass text

ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

After the Lord was baptised, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit descended upon him like a dove, and the voice of the Father thundered: This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.

FIRST READING Isaiah 40:1-5. 9-11

PSALM Psalm 103

RESPONSE Bless the Lord, my soul!
Lord God, how great you are.

1. Lord God, how great you are, clothed in majesty and glory, wrapped in light as in a robe! You stretch out the heavens like a tent. R.
2. Above the rains you build your dwelling. You make the clouds your chariot, you walk on the wings of the wind, you make the winds your messengers and flashing fire your servants. R.
3. How many are your works, O Lord! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of your riches. There is the sea, vast and wide, with its moving swarms past counting, living things great and small. R.

4. All of these look to you to give them their food in due season. You give it, they gather it up: you open your hand, they have their fill. R.
5. You take back your spirit, they die, returning to the dust from which they came. You send forth your spirit, they are created; and you renew the face of the earth. R.

SECOND READING Titus 2:11-14; 3:4-7

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia, alleluia!
Someone is coming, said John, someone greater than I.
He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.
Alleluia!

GOSPEL Luke 3:15-16. 21-22

COMMUNION ANTIPHON

Behold the One of whom John said: I have seen and testified that this is the Son of God.

Next Sunday's Readings:

Isaiah 62:1-5
1 Corinthians 12:4-11
John 2:1-11



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POINTING TO ANOTHER

"As to the numbers who become Christians, you may understand them from this, that it often happens to me to be hardly able to use my hands from the fatigue of baptising: often in a single day I have baptised whole villages. Sometimes I have lost my voice and strength altogether with repeating again and again the Credo and the other forms."

These words were those of St Francis Xavier, the sixteenth-century Jesuit missionary who, known as the "Apostle of the Indies" and "Apostle of Japan", was one of the greatest missionaries since St Paul.

Such was Xavier's impact wherever he went that he is credited with baptising an estimated 700,000 people. When he died, probably of malaria, on 3 December 1552, he was waiting for a boat to carry him from the island of Shangchuan to mainland China, less than nine miles away. Xavier's body was eventually carried to Goa, India, where millions of people have venerated him for nearly five hundred years.

In 1614, Xavier's right forearm, with which he had blessed and baptised so many converts, was detached and carried to Rome, where it was placed in a silver reliquary above an altar at the main Jesuit church, Il Gesù. Millions of pilgrims have since knelt in prayer at that altar and probably millions more will do likewise.

We have no record of the number of people who came to the River Jordan to hear John the Baptist and to be baptised by him. The New Testament doesn't say whether his followers who later became Jesus' disciples had been baptised, although we presume that they were. The Gospels tell us that Jesus came to the Jordan, asked John to baptise him and that John tried to refuse but didn't succeed.

Both John the Baptist and Francis Xavier went to great pains to tell their listeners that they should not be the focus of their religious faith. John and Xavier both pointed beyond themselves to someone who was more powerful and would have a greater impact on their lives. Both declared that they were no more than witnesses. John declared of the one who was coming, "I am not fit to undo the strap of his sandals." For his part, Francis Xavier wrote to St Ignatius of Loyola, "If I were not a witness of it all, as I am, I would not be able to believe what I have seen in [God]."

If you think about it, not everyone can cope with fame. Crowds of people travelled to meet John. After all, he had a wonderful, down-to-earth practicality, could happily condemn self-seeking

Hope in the darkness



Sister Janet Fearn FMDM concludes this series of reflections by considering two saints who pointed beyond themselves.



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THE BAPTISM OF THE LORD

YEAR C

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I