

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

A Role We Don't Understand From January 2 to Epiphany Sts. Basil the Great and Gregory Nazianzen, bishops and Doctors of the Church Wednesday, January 2, 2019 8:15 AM 1 Jn 2:22-28; **Jn 1:19-28** (We are called on to continue in faithfulness doing what we are supposed to be doing as far as we can understand it, and that witness is proclaiming the gospel to other people.)

“John answered them, ‘I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.’”

John the Baptist is a very important figure. In one sense he belongs to the Old Covenant, but in another sense he belongs to the New. Some theologians believe that when he leapt in the womb of his mother Elizabeth, at the time of what we call the Visitation, that he was actually baptized with the Holy Spirit. Well, maybe, maybe not, I don't know; I don't know how you could tell that. **But he surely was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and his life was a true prophecy, but he denied he was “the prophet.”**

Now what does that mean, “the prophet”? Well **the Jewish people at that time expected a final prophet to precede the Messiah.** Well actually that is what John was, but **he was not aware of it.** So here they say, “Well are you the prophet?” He said, “No.” “Are you Elijah?” He said, “No,” but actually Jesus said, “Yes,” because **Jesus said, “Yes, indeed, Elijah has already come.” And his disciples realized he was talking about John the Baptist.** So these things are not all simple and clear distinct ideas or concepts. They are expectations that have to be, first of all, carried very gently. They have to be thought about with devotion. They have to be discerned by the very same Spirit that sent John in the first place. Indeed, **in all this we need the Holy Spirit.**

Now **John performed ministry for God which he himself did not quite understand.** He didn't quite understand his role in the whole history of salvation. And that is very typical of people. **We don't know our role in the history of salvation.** We play a very important role in many

people's lives, but God does not let us know that. It's better if we don't know that. We are called on to be faithful to what God has called us to: to hold onto that anointing we received at the beginning, alluded to in the first reading. **We are called on to continue in faithfulness doing what we are supposed to be doing as far as we can understand it, and that witness is proclaiming the gospel to other people.** And in some cases it's a very forceful witness to the truth, and **we don't know who it is we are touching.** It could be members of our families, or it could be utter strangers that we may recognize in some sense, but not actually know.

So in many ways we are all John the Baptist. **We are called to play a role we can't quite understand.** We are called on to be **bold**, as he was, not to be shy and retiring, but to be bold, **to be audacious with the truth, but not to use it as a club to beat people into submission.** We are called on **simply to be truthful** and as he points out, "I am not worthy to untie his sandals," none of us is worthy to untie the sandals of **Christ, and yet he unties our sandals and washes our feet.** This is the sacred irony that, in a sense, we celebrate every time we gather for Eucharist, which is always in remembrance of the Last Supper where Christ, first of all, **elevated his disciples to friendship and then became their servants. He does the same for us as we gather at his supper.**