

## **Homily: Jan. 8, 2022**

By Fr. Virgil Petermeier, osc

As we come to the end of our two weeks of celebrating the birth of Jesus and his reception by both shepherds and wise men, we have come full circle back to John the Baptist, who helps us see more clearly, what child this is. He is the Messiah, the Savior of the world, whose coming John the Baptist foretold. John humbly and peacefully acknowledged the priority of Jesus' presence and the necessity for Jesus to become more widely known. We are not always so humble. And so, we call out to our compassionate God, Lord Have Mercy.

John the Baptist knew who he was and who he wasn't. He knew himself as a prophet, but knew he was not the Messiah. He was at peace with his role of preparing for the coming of Jesus, who would draw the larger crowds. In fact, John compared Jesus to a bridegroom and himself to a best man who rejoices in hearing the bridegroom's voice. This is all servant imagery and language. We admire and value John's conclusion, "He [Jesus] must increase and I must decrease."

And ever since John the Baptist, our heart goes out to people who are at peace being the servant of something or someone much bigger than themselves. On the contrary, ever since John the Baptist, we usually react negatively to people who boastfully present themselves as the savior or the big messiah. Deep down, we sense the unfortunate bluster and boast because we know there is only one Messiah—the Christ of True Love only.

As I reflected on John the Baptist, the image of a baker came to mind. She or he prepares the flour, the other ingredients and finally mixes the yeast therein. Then the baker puts the whole container of dough in a warm moist place. But the rising of the bread has to be left to the yeast working silently and mysteriously inside the dough. One can only serve and facilitate the role of the yeast, but not take over the role of swelling the dough.

As we prepare for and begin conducting synodal conversations, we must wear the sandals of John the Baptist and the flour-smudged apron of a baker. We serve the synod process by inviting and preparing groups, composing the questions, arranging schedules and places. But ultimately, we must hand the subsequent process to the Holy Spirit who works like yeast in the hearts of the participants and group facilitators and prompts the

rise of conversation and sharing to gradually become inspirational food or bread for all the participants, and ultimately for the Church.

Parents of a family of children will have the best family when they, too, can say along with John the Baptist, “He must increase and I must decrease.” Parents hopefully realize at some point that they can’t in any absolute fashion be the Messiah for the family. There is only one Messiah, the Christ of True love, whose spirit is work 24-7 in the heart of each family member. Christ’s spirit is like mysterious yeast, growing the family into a wonderful micro-kingdom of God. Parents along with their children can prepare only so much, and the rest of the growth is up to the Holy Spirit’s persistent and resilient work—much like God’s life-force which is prompting several volleys of gorgeous deep red trumpets to grow out of these rootless golden bulbs.

Once again, with John the Baptist we, too, must say, “He [the Messiah’s Holy Spirit] must increase and I must decrease.”