

December 2014¹

Word of Life

"Whoever has two coats must share with anyone who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise" (Lk 3:11)

These words are taken from the preaching of John the Baptist. The evangelist Luke recounts that publicans were among the crowds that went to the River Jordan to be baptized. Because of their profession as tax collectors for the Roman authorities, they were considered public sinners. There were also soldiers among the crowds. Since they were coming from a pagan background, they were held to be 'far from God.' Luke points, however, to the good will of these persons, as their question to John the Baptist shows: What can we do to bring about the conversion necessary to meet the Messiah?

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This exhortation, with its very concrete recommendations, is the answer that John the Baptist gives to these people of good will. Luke's purpose in recording this scene is to help us understand better that the conversion of heart needed to prepare for Jesus does not consist in beautiful words and an effusion of sentiments. Rather it lies in doing the will of God, primarily loving our neighbours, concretely expressing our solidarity and sharing our possessions, food, clothing, lodging, help, etc. with those who lack the essentials.

It is what Jesus will teach later on. The Christian life, in fact, does not primarily consist in long prayers and exhausting penances; it does not ask us to change our profession or occupation (provided they are good in themselves) but rather that we live love of neighbour in our life circumstances and activities.

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Another important teaching that the evangelist wants to communicate is that friendship with God and holiness are not reserved to a privileged category of persons and are not bound to a particular life situation. They are open to all.

In addition, he makes the point that an authentic Christian life based on love of neighbour is easily understood by and attracts those considered 'far from God.'

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How then should we live this word of life? This is December, the month in which we celebrate Christmas. For the Church, Christmas is not simply the commemoration of a past event. It is the celebration of an ever-present and ever-new mystery: the birth of Jesus in us and among us.

How can we then prepare ourselves for Christmas? What should we do so that Jesus can be born or reborn in us and among us? Love concretely.

Let us be sure that our love of neighbour does not stop at words or sentiments, rather may it be translated into action, be it great or small.

¹ Published in 1998