

## ***Homily for the Nativity of John the Baptist – June 24, 2018***

Well are you ready for Christmas? Finished your Christmas shopping? You realize Christmas is just six months away from today June 24<sup>th</sup>.

Can always tell it is six months away by today's feast of John the Baptist. John the Baptist will always show up on the church's liturgical calendar this time of the year ....six months before Christmas. And that is not by accident.

You see John the Baptist, who is viewed in the gospel as preparing the way of the Lord, comes on the scene about June 24<sup>th</sup>....six months before December 25<sup>th</sup>. He comes around at the start of summer.

The time when the days begin to become shorter if only by seconds. From now until late December there is less and less daylight. And then in late December when the days are the darkest.....the light of the world comes with the birth of Jesus the Christ.

My time as your pastor is becoming shorter and shorter. Our time together is about to end. In just a few days you will have a new pastor. You will meet him as he celebrates the weekend masses of July 1<sup>st</sup>.

Our paths, yours and mine, first crossed in July of 2014. Now it will formally end on first weekend of July of 2018. What has been going on in your life these past four years.

I bet you have had some John the Baptist experiences. A John the Baptist experience is something or someone which somehow has deepened your belief and relationship with the Lord.

For sure you have changed. There is no way anyone of us in this summer of 2018 is the same person today that they were in July of 2014. Something has happened.

You retired.....or began a new job... bought a different car. Something has happened.

You faced a serious health problem.....lost a family member or found a friend...have a new granddaughter. Something has happened.

Your grandson graduated from college.....went into the military..... moved into a new church building.

John the Baptist moments are any experience, if looked in a faith filled way, that can deepen your relationship with Christ. It could be a conflict....or a consolation....it could be a new home or new found hobby.....it could be someone's death or someone's birth.

Since July of 2014.....until today.....you probably have had John the Baptist moments preparing you for another side of your relationship with God. It might have been your personal cross or crucifixion....might have been a betrayal or your own private agony in the garden....or even a personal Easter resurrection and springtime in your soul.

They might have been very painful moments.... or very happy ones....God doesn't waste anything. We have a very thrifty God.

He allows all sorts of experiences in our lives which have the potential of drawing us closer to Christ. I call them John the Baptist moments. For they can prepare our soul for the Lord to deepen his presence in our soul.

That is certainly true for me. This time last July of 2017, I had no concrete plans for retirement from parish ministry. But slowly it became clearer and clearer through conversations and reflections that God was calling me now to a different type of

ministry. One that would take me to parishes throughout the country speaking for the poor in Latin America.

And now our time together is ending. We first met at a Sunday mass in 2014 celebrating the Eucharist. I told you then to tell me your name as you left church. And that by the following Sunday I would know each of your names. Don't recall? Well I fibbed. Didn't memorize names.

But I am not fibbing about this: when it came time for Jesus to say goodbye to those he cared for, he could not do it. Jesus could not say goodbye and really mean it.

You know it is hard to say goodbye and really mean it. Students graduating from high school and college are in denial and say "This is not goodbye.....I have your cell phone number.....or I have your e-mail.....we will be in touch....yet the truth is they lose touch.

Maybe this is why Jesus could not say goodbye and really mean it. He could not say goodbye without leaving himself.....in the Eucharist.

If you and I remember each other when we celebrate the Eucharist we never have to say goodbye and mean it. That's true for our deceased loved ones too. What we are doing here, they are doing in heaven.

So let us join them, let's continue, continue the mass, continue the celebration of the Eucharist, so we will never have to say goodbye and really mean it.