

Insights into Liturgy

# Jesus and John the Baptist

By MSGR. WILLIAM H. SHANNON

A constant endeavor in the Christian life is to rise up to the level of Jesus' understanding of God. Jesus presents a vision of God — a God of love and forgiveness — that is without precedent in the teachings of His correlative. Perhaps the best way of appreciating the radical newness of Jesus' revelation of God is to compare the teachings of Jesus with the teachings of that great prophet who is on the border of the Old Testament and the New — John the Baptist. The season of Advent which we are now celebrating invites us to make this comparison.

Jesus and John both preached repentance: men must change their way of thinking and acting. But John preaches repentance because the judgment is at hand, whereas Jesus preaches repentance because the Reign of God is at hand. In this different orientation of His preaching we see the uniqueness of Jesus. John is in the tradition of the great prophets of Israel, calling for repentance in the face of impending judgment. Jesus breaks with that tradition: He preaches repentance as the condition necessary for accepting the Reign of God in our lives. John preaches: be repentant, for God is about to punish. Jesus preaches: be repentant, for God is about to forgive. John says: brace yourselves for the judgment that is to come. Jesus says: open your hearts, so that you can receive the forgiveness that God is offering.

This revelation of the Father's universal, undefeated and reconciling love is a vision of God that is without parallel in the teachings of the Jewish leaders of Jesus' time. However exalted an understanding of God the Jewish people may have arrived at before Jesus, there is nothing in the Old Testament that parallels Jesus' unique vision of God. There are glimpses of God's love in the Old Testament, for example, in Deuteronomy or in the prophecies of Hosea, but always that love is clouded over with the vision of a God who punishes relentlessly. Think, for example, of David, one of the Old Testament figures most dearly loved by God. Yet David, though a man after God's own heart, does not escape the divine punishment. On one occasion his punishment is to watch his infant son die before his very eyes. On another occasion when, perhaps in pride, he took a census of his people, God forgives him for this affront to the divine majesty; yet nonetheless David must be punished. He is given a three-fold choice; three years of famine or three months of fleeing from his enemies or three days of pestilence. (See 2 Samuel 24:13 ff.) Yes, the people of the Old Testament believed that their God was a forgiving God; but they almost seemed to take for granted that punishment was the necessary accompaniment of forgiveness. God would forgive, but man had to pay the price for that forgiveness.

## The God who confronts David Pupils Take Top Prizes

Three pupils at St. Ambrose School recently were named winners in the Irondequoit Narcotics Guidance Council's poster contest. United States Savings Bonds for \$25 were given to Sarah Lewis, seventh grade; Evelyn Cammarino, sixth grade; Mike Houser, sixth grade.

According to Mary Caliri of the Ladies Auxiliary of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, who helped with the project, more than 600 children participated. The St. Ambrose pupils were among nine area youngsters to receive the top prizes. The posters will be displayed throughout Irondequoit, Mrs. Caliri said.

and demands that he pay the price for his sin is scarcely recognizable in the God revealed in Jesus Christ. For the God whom Jesus reveals always comes to us as Savior. The message of Advent is that He comes to us as Savior in Jesus Christ.



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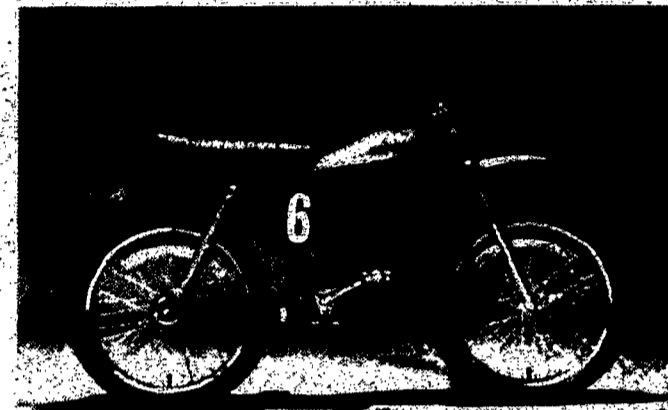


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