
“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”

his life, he lived what he preached, and thus led many people to conversion. This is what we priests today are told by the Church: The priest “should be capable of witnessing to poverty with a simple and austere lifestyle (OT 9; Canon Law, Can. 282)” (St. John Paul II, *Pastores dabo Vobis*, 30.2).

“Thanks to the insightful teaching of the Second Vatican Council (cf. PO 4-6, 13), we can grasp the conditions and demands, the manifestations and fruits of the intimate bond between the priest's spiritual life and the exercise of his three-fold ministry of word, sacrament and pastoral charity.

The priest is first of all a minister of the word of God. ... the priest himself ought first of all to develop a great personal familiarity with the word of God. Knowledge of its linguistic or exegetical aspects, ... approach ... with a docile and prayerful heart so that ... his words and his choices and attitudes may become ever more a reflection, a proclamation and a witness to the Gospel. ... The priest ought to be the first ‘believer’ in the word, ... as a sharer in the prophetic authority of Christ and the Church” (Ibid., 26).

4. Dear Brothers in the Priesthood

We priests can read this opening passage of St. Luke’s gospel with special interest. St. John is often referred to as an angel, meaning that his mission was angelic or like an angel. Should we not also associate ourselves with the angels? From the three, the one closest to us is Zechariah, and he was the one in greatest need. May not the angels be sent to the side of priests today as then, who mediate between us and our Lord, who wake us up as Gabriel did with Zechariah, who lead us and also prepare the acceptance of our ministry by the people? May we be guided by St. Gabriel as we meditate on the Gospel of St. Luke and may he help us to look, as he, first to God and then to the people; to balance correctly between fidelity to the Lord and compassion with the people or, as Pope Benedict XVI taught, to live “love in truth” (3 Jn 1:1).

Fr. Titus Kieninger ORC

Mark your calendar for the retreat in Holly, MI: November 9th to 13th, 2015.

ASSOCIATION OF PRIESTS IN THE WORK OF THE HOLY ANGELS®

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CHRIST’S PRIESTS UNITED WITH THE HOLY ANGELS IN THE CHURCH

“Could you not watch one hour with Me?”



Association of Priests In Opus Angelorum®

“I am Gabriel ... have been sent ... to you” (Lk 1:5) XXI, May 2015

Dear Brothers in the Priesthood!

Together with Pope Francis’ solemn annunciation of the “Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy” we begin our reflection on the Angels in the Gospel of Saint Luke, “whose Gospel has earned the title of ‘the Gospel of mercy’.” (St. John Paul II, *Dives in Misericordia*, 1980, 3). St. Luke wanted to make sure that he approached his great task in a scientific way, “investigating everything carefully” (Lk 1:3). This encourages us to read his gospel with childlike faith and trust, but also with the same great care with which he wrote it.

Looking attentively at it, we realize that St. Luke knows about an angel who initiated the preparation for the coming of Jesus into the world and about two angels when He left the world, at His ascension (cf. Lk 24:50-52 with Acts 1:10-11). This suggests that we consider the very mission of the angels in man’s life already as a gift of Divine Mercy.

Let us, full of gratitude, look into the opening story of this gospel. St. Luke, and he alone, gives us a detailed description of the mission of St. Gabriel to the “priest named Zechariah” (Lk 1:5) with the annunciation of the birth of St. John the Baptist (1:5-25). We can relate these three persons to our own priesthood: Zechariah in his function as priest; St. Gabriel acting like a pastor and St. John the Baptist foretold as a prophet.

1. The pastoral care of God for man

There was the couple, Zechariah and Elizabeth, who lived a *righteous* life, but were without child. When Zechariah who “belonged to the priestly order” (Lk 1:5) was chosen to “enter the sanctuary of the Lord and offer incense” (1:9) there then took place what we consider here.

a) The messenger from Heaven

In this fitting moment, “there appeared to (Zechariah) an angel of the Lord, standing at the right side of the altar of incense” (v. 11), a position which underlines his dignity and high origin (cf. Mk 16:5). In spite of these good conditions, Zechariah “was terrified; and fear overwhelmed him” (Lk 1:12), when he saw the angel. The angel took initiative “and spoke to him”. He encouraged him and relieved his fear and told him that his prayer for a child “has been heard” (v.13). He

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foretold: “Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will name him John” (v. 13).

Notwithstanding the prayers of this holy couple, these words were unexpected news and Zechariah expressed his doubts, for he had effectively given up hope: “How will I know that this is so?”

To this the angel reacted in a severe way. He identified himself as one who comes from God: “I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you” (v. 19); furthermore, he entered with authority: “because you did not believe my words, ... you will become mute ..., until the day these things occur” (v. 20). Was the angel too severe, without mercy? Did he forget to respect human freedom? Not at all. The angel has not come in his own name, but in God’s. He is, first of all, servant of God! Zechariah needs help to understand and embrace the divine plan. Zechariah hesitates in a certain disbelief, out of weakness, not malice. The words of Jesus to Peter apply well: “You think the thoughts of man and not the thoughts of God.” Accordingly, St. Gabriel’s severity is really one of pastoral solicitude, whereby he applies a medicinal penance that frees Zechariah from his disbelief and leads him, at the end, to such perfect joy, that we recite his canticle daily in the divine office. May our holy angels treat us also with such solicitous severity!

b) St. Gabriel – model of Pastors

St. Gabriel acted here like a prophet, but also in the way of a pastor: He referred to man’s situation and needs. He consoled and pointed out the value of prayer. He confirmed man’s faith and encouraged obedience as the way to union with God’s powerful love. However, he also encountered opposition and rejection by man’s lack of faith and trust, humility and surrender.

It is a joy-filled mission to announce God’s will to mankind as the angels do. For us it is an honor for which we are often not worthy! But it is also a challenge which we priests experience daily, in the confessional or parlour, on the pulpit or on the phone. As we see it here with St. Gabriel, so we see it even in the life of the Master Himself, Jesus. Did He not speak of an invitation to a great dinner to which many were invited “But they all alike began to make excuses... I cannot come’.” (Lk 14:16-20). Later, He will tell us, “a disciple is not above the teacher” (Lk 6:40; cf. Jn 15:18-25). If they did not want to listen to Jesus, nor here in this case to an angel, how can we expect that they listen to us? Still, if we look first to God in humble adoration like the angels, then the joy of serving him is always greater than the pain caused by peoples rejection.

2. Zechariah – the priest

The priest Zechariah seems to have been a very sober person.

a) The masculine nature

He *saw* the Angel at a concrete place and trembled for fear; he *heard* him speak;

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evidently the angel manifested himself physically. St. Gabriel pointed out that the prayers for a child were heard, assuring him that God is attentive and cares. Nevertheless, Zechariah hesitated to believe. He trusted too much in his own reason, he reasoned and could not figure out how this might be possible under the given circumstances. So he expressed frankly, even towards the angel, his doubt on that heavenly message: “How will I know that this is so?” He still wanted a sign to recognize the divine origin of the promise. He referred to his advanced age and that of his wife (v. 18). The angel gave him a sign, but the sign was rather a medicinal punishment: “Because you did not believe my words, ... you will become mute” (v. 20).

b) The Liturgist

Zechariah had a pure heart. He prayed personally and publicly, fulfilling his liturgical duties. But did he participate interiorly? Was he a man of faith or did he just fulfill his functions? We may be able to identify ourselves with him, especially on busy weekends with many liturgical actions, baptisms, weddings, confessions, Sunday-masses at different places, and perhaps still dealing with practical matters for parishioners, or attending social events ...

It seems that the angel was able to wake Zechariah up through the imposition of silence. Entering in himself, Zechariah might have remembered the instruction given to Moses: “Do not rebel against him [the angel], for he will not pardon your transgression; for my name is in him” (Ex 23:21). After his first objection, Zechariah cooperated and obeyed so that the child was born, he gave him the name John as the angel had directed, and “immediately, his mouth was opened and his tongue freed, and he began to speak, praising God” (Lk 1:63f).

3. St. John – the prophet

The third person, the cause of whole encounter, did not even exist yet, St. John. However, the angel had clearly received various instructions about him.

a) The prophetic Forerunner

Gabriel explained to his father Zechariah: His birth will bring joy to many! “Even before his birth he will be filled with the Holy Spirit” (v. 15). He should lead a sober life as “he must never drink wine or strong drink” (v. 15) because he has a great mission: “He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God” (v. 16) and “turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord” (v. 17). “With the spirit and power of Elijah he will go before Him” (v. 17), that is, his Lord and Savior.

b) The prophetic witness

St. John the Baptist is the last prophet of the Old Testament, the only one who could also see Him, Whom he announced. He gave testimony by word and with