

Nativity of John the Baptist

America breathed a collective sigh of relief this week with the end of an immigration policy that separated children from their parents. Viewpoints on how best to secure our border clashed with viewpoints on how best to show compassion. Leaders in politics, business and religion appealed for a change in a policy that was hurting vulnerable children. Although thousands of children are still separated, change has come.

The forced taking of children from their parents seems so obviously immoral that people have wondered how our country could have sponsored the practice. Yet in the broader view, the value of a child's life in this country continually hangs in the balance. Abortion kills children in the womb. Many men abandon kids they have biologically fathered. Inattentive parents running errands on a hot day have locked children inside cars that smother. Photographers force children into pornography, and those who view their photos keep children enslaved. Family members and church leaders have sexually abused children in crimes that go unreported. The non-reporting of abuse places other children at risk of harm by the same abuser. Within this dystopia perhaps we need not wonder how some people in our country thought that separating children as a deterrent seemed like a good idea. The problem is vaster than border control.

The birth of a child is the subject of today's feast on the Catholic Church calendar. Exactly six months before Christmas Eve we celebrate the Nativity of John the Baptist. The day is so important to our church that when it falls on a Sunday, it overrides Ordinary Time. This is especially unusual because our general practice regarding saints is to observe the day of their death, not the day of their birth. That's why we celebrate Valentine's Day on February 14 and St. Patrick's Day on March 17. Those are the dates on which those saints died and entered eternal life. We don't celebrate their birthdays.

John the Baptist is different because he bridges the Old and New Testaments as a prophet for the coming of Christ. As prophets of old foretold his coming by their words, John foretold it also by his life. He was miraculously conceived, as was Jesus. He spent time in the desert, as did Jesus. He preached repentance to his disciples, as did Jesus. He was targeted by enemies, arrested, and brutally, unjustly killed, as was Jesus. In celebrating John's birth the Church affirms that the complete life of John the Baptist prophesied the complete life of Christ. Whenever we look at the infant photos of a person we know now as an adult, we can see much more of who that child will become than the person who aimed the camera on that distant day. That's how we see the birth of John the Baptist today. We see the complete person in the face of the child.

God sees the complete person in every child - even before that child was born. Today's responsorial psalm includes this beautiful prayer: **Sun:** "I praise you for I am wonderfully made.... It was you who formed my inmost being, knit me together in my mother's womb." // **Sat:** "Since my mother's womb, you have been my strength.... On you I have leaned from my birth."

Children are more than faces, whether in the womb or on the border. We celebrate their birthdays, for they too are prophets to the presence of Christ.

Sunday, June 24, 2018