

Many years ago while I was a seminarian a group of grade-school aged children came for a visit to the seminary. The group stayed for daily Mass. The priest offering the Mass decided to visit with them during the homily. The day happened to be a saint's feast day. The large stained glass windows with their various figures positioned high on the side walls bathed the chapel in rainbows of color. "Can anybody tell me who a saint is?" Father asked. A multitude of hands shot up, looking a bit like "the wave" at an athletic event. The priest singled out one little boy. Suddenly tongue tied the boy looked anxiously around no doubt trying to recall the answer that just seconds before had been on the tip of his tongue. Finally looking up at the walls noticing the windows and the all the colors he blurted out, "Someone who lets the light shine through them." No better definition has ever been given.

This weekend John the Baptist again occupies a central place in the liturgy. St. John the Evangelist in the Gospel tells us about the Baptist in a few descriptive verses. When asked, "who are you?" by the Jewish religious leaders the Baptist quickly answers that he is not the Christ, the promised Messiah, nor Elijah the prophet who by tradition was said to have been taken into heaven in a fiery chariot and was believed would return to earth prior to the coming of the Messiah, nor one of the other great prophets of Israel's history reincarnated. Just who the Baptist is he himself tells us: "I am the voice of one crying out in the desert, make straight the way of the Lord" (Jn.1:23) and "there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie" (Jn.1:27). The Gospel writer John summarizes this all up when he states: "A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light. ...He was not the light but came to testify to the light" (Jn.1:6-8).

John was like a figure in a stained glass window. Neither originating the light that shines through it, nor absorbing the light into itself, John was a man filled with the light of God who allowed that light to not only fill him, but also pass through him to others. John and his mission is a model for us.

Unlike John's baptism which was for the forgiveness of sins only, our baptism plunged us into Christ's saving mystery which includes but is not limited to the forgiveness of Original Sin. Our baptism transforms us into the Body of Christ and initiates a life-long and unique relationship to Christ and each other. As the baptized, we share in John's mission to announce the presence of Christ among and within us. We also share in Jesus' mission to announce what God has already accomplished, and continues to accomplish, through the person of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us in the world today. Through us, the Church, the body of Christ, God continues to bring about "a year of favor." This mission is made clear in the newly composed dismissal formulas we've begun to use at Mass: "Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord" or "Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life." Our call, our mission is to also be stained glass windows—allowing the light of Christ to fill us and pass through us to the world.

As he began his public ministry, Jesus in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of St. Luke's gospel quotes today's first reading from the prophet Isaiah as his "mission statement." Jesus has come to bring "glad tidings to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to captives, and release to prisoners" (Isa. 61:1-2a, Lk.4:1ff). Our financial contributions to this weekend's annual appeal to assist in the care for our retired religious order priests, brothers and sisters who have served the church faithfully for forty, fifty, seventy or more years and now look to us as family to help them; our parish's "Black Bag" monthly collection, the fledgling efforts to establish the "Gabriel Project" for women experiencing a crisis pregnancy; our homebound Holy Communion ministers who bring the Sacrament of the altar and the sacrament of their presence to our homebound; the jail ministry in our area; anytime any of us takes the time to be with someone who needs our attention in word or just simple presence; a holiday note of phone call to a loved one or friend; just a simple smile and a "hello" to a fellow worker or the cashier behind the counter at the grocery store—these and so many others are ways that we continue the mission of Jesus, that we become, and are, "saints"--windows of light.