

Father O'Connor's Homily for 18 January 2026
Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – A

Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6
1 Corinthians 1: 1-3
John 1: 29-34

In Christian art, whenever John the Baptist and Jesus are in the same scene, John is always pointing out Jesus to others, and Jesus is always featured more prominently than John.

In today's Gospel when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him, John said to the crowds, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.... He is the Son of God." John's ministry was: to point out Jesus Christ to others and help them make Jesus the center of their lives.

Now doesn't that description of the role of John the Baptist sound familiar? Isn't this our vocation as well? Oh yes, there are the vocations of bishops, priests, deacons and consecrated religious women and men. But I am talking about all of us who claim to be Christians. Our role is to point out Jesus Christ to others and help them make Jesus the center of their lives, as John the Baptist did.

I remember a First Holy Communion and seeing the parents of the new communicants beaming afterwards. And one of the dads there who said to me, "Father, I just feel so happy because my role, my vocation as a parent, is to help my child get closer to Christ. And today my boy has taken a giant step as he received Jesus in his First Holy Communion." That father was a John the Baptist for his son, pointing out Jesus Christ to him and helping him make Jesus the center of his life too. And that is what we are all supposed to do.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan, the recently retiring Archbishop of New York, tells a powerful story about the example of Saint John the Baptist in his own life. And these are his own words:

I can remember the exact date – April 3, 1977. I was at a wake, standing near the casket when a man walked up to pay his respects. And he said to me: "Do you know this man in the casket?"

"Yes, I do."

"Well, so do I," he replied. "Bob, here in the casket, saved my life."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well," he explained, "we worked together for 15 years and I always admired his joy, his upbeat attitude, and his spirit of helpfulness. You know, he would always stick up for the underdog, and he'd always be there.

"One time I couldn't make my house payment and it was Bob who loaned me the money. When my wife was diagnosed with cancer, it was Bob who kept asking about her, saying, 'We're praying. Don't give up!'

"After my wife died, I got to drinking real bad and it was Bob who took me aside and talked sense into me and got me to sober up for the sake of my kids. I just love this guy so much."

He continued, "I finally said to him one day, 'Bob, what make you tick? What gives you this spirit of joy and hope and goodness to friends? Where do you get it?'

"Bob just kind of blushed and said, 'Well, I don't know. I guess it's my faith. I am a Catholic. I love my faith. I love my religion. I guess that's what keeps me going.'

"And I said to him, 'Bob, could I have that too?' And he said, 'Sure.' And it was Bob who introduced me to a priest. I took instructions in the Catholic faith. It was Bob who was my Godfather for my Baptism and my Sponsor for Confirmation. This guy saved my life and gave me faith."

Well, by that time he was crying, and by that time I was crying too because Bob, the man in the casket, about whom he was speaking, happened to be my father, my dad, who had dropped dead at work at 51 years of age.

I knew my dad took his faith seriously but I never really thought he was a saint. And here was this guy at my dad's wake telling me that my father was a Saint John the Baptist for him. My dad had pointed out Jesus Christ to this man who was searching for Him.

And the lesson for all of us today? John the Baptist's calling to point out Jesus Christ to others and help them make Jesus the center of their lives is our calling too.

As John the Baptist was called to announce Jesus, so are we, right where we are. In John the Baptist's words or in our very own: "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.... He is the Son of God."