



Jesus said to the crowds: “Amen, I say to you, among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he. From the days of John the Baptist until now, the Kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent are taking it by force. All the prophets and the law prophesied up to the time of John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah, the one who is to come. Whoever has ears ought to hear.”

Introductory Prayer:

Lord, I believe in your presence here with me as I humbly kneel before you to do you homage and praise you. I long for the reward you have promised to those who love you with undivided hearts. My heart is not at peace until it rests in you.

Petition: Lord, help me to long for and strive for the inexpressible joy of heaven.

1. None Greater Than John: In a phrase tinged with admiration, Christ pays St. John the Baptist the highest of compliments: “Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist.” And Christ reveals why: He is the last of the prophets, the one who brings the age of the law and the prophets to a close. But he is even more. He is Elijah, the one sent before the promised Messiah to prepare the way for him. Then comes an unexpected reversal: “Yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” Do not Christ’s words awaken in our hearts an ardent longing for heaven? What else could matter in life but to arrive there, where the least of us will be greater than the greatest one on this earth?

2. Longing for Heaven: How much do we really desire to reach our final goal? Does our attitude sometimes reflect St. Augustine's during the process of his conversion, before he received the final, definitive grace of entrusting his life entirely to God? Do we not have to confess that we often say to God, "Lord, please bring me to heaven—but not yet!"? St. Cyprian reflects on this phenomenon in one of his homilies: "How unreasonable it is to pray that God's will be done, and then not promptly obey it when he calls us from this world! Instead we struggle and resist like self-willed slaves and are brought into the Lord's presence with sorrow and lamentation, not freely consenting to our departure, but constrained by necessity. And yet we expect to be rewarded with heavenly honors by him to whom we come against our will!"

3. The Kingdom of Heaven Suffers Violence: A true longing for heaven is necessary, because it is not easy to arrive there. Christ assures us, "The kingdom of heaven suffers violence." What does Our Lord mean by this enigmatic affirmation? Surely he does not intend to contradict his own new commandment of love? The "violence" Christ speaks of must be done exclusively to ourselves. In order to ascend the heights of holiness we need to follow in the footsteps of St. John the Baptist, dying to our earthly tendencies. Am I prepared to renounce what often seems most intimately a part of me? Can I beg the Lord for humility? "That others may be more loved than I. That others may be called to occupy posts and I may be forgotten. That others may be preferred to me in everything. Lord Jesus, make this my prayer" (from *Litany of Humility*, traditional prayer).

Conversation with Christ: Lord, you are showing me that heaven is not for the weak and the soft, but for those who are strong in dying to themselves and living for you and for souls. Help me to grow in fortitude in order to win heaven.

Resolution: Today, when I experience something painful or difficult, I will offer up the unpleasantness to God, knowing it is nothing in comparison to the reward of heaven that awaits me.