



The crowds asked John the Baptist, "What then should we do?" He said to them in reply, "Whoever has two cloaks should share with the person who has none. And whoever has food should do likewise." Even tax collectors came to be baptized and they said to him, "Teacher, what should we do?" He answered them, "Stop collecting more than what is prescribed." Soldiers also asked him, "And what is it that we should do?" He told them, "Do not practice extortion, do not falsely accuse anyone, and be satisfied with your wages." Now the people were filled with expectation, and all were asking in their hearts whether John might be the Messiah. John answered them all, saying, "I am baptizing you with water, but one mightier than I is coming. I am not worthy to loosen the thongs of his sandals. He will baptize you with the holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire." Exhorting them in many other ways, he preached good news to the people.

Introductory Prayer: As Christmas draws near, I desire to learn more deeply your example of humility by coming among us as an infant. I pray that this season rekindles my sense of hope in your providence.

Petition: Jesus, grant me the grace to grow in the virtue I need to cultivate most.

1. Within Reach: Charity demands justice, at the very least. According to the Compendium of the Catechism (no. 381), justice consists in the firm and constant will to give to others their due. In this passage Saint John the Baptist points out two levels of justice toward neighbor. In the first level, he tells the tax collectors and soldiers to be content with the money that comes their way rightfully. The second level goes further. It demands that we share our surplus with those in genuine need. That surplus could be all

around us: in our closet, our pantry, our checkbook. What could I share with the poor? A saintly maxim says: Live simply, so that others can simply live.

2. Open to All: People of all sorts approach John the Baptist for advice. He responds to them all. They hunger for meaning. They want to repent. Those same people are with us today. Maybe they are fallen-away Catholics, or Evangelicals, or Jews, or Muslims, or even atheists. They too seek meaning in their lives. All of them, whether or not they realize it, seek Christ, who "fully reveals man to man himself" (Gaudium et Spes, 22). Have I been willing to share that "secret" with others? Are there areas of my life where I shy away from talking about religion? The office? The mall? The dinner table? John the Baptist wouldn't exclude anyone. Would I?

3. Groundwork: By calling for charity and justice John wants to prepare the people for the arrival of the Messiah. Without hearts open to others, they would not be able to accept the robust message of Christ. Charity prepares the heart for the seed of the Gospel. If ever my relationship with Christ grows cold, I should ask, "How is my charity? The key to finding myself demands that I look first to serve God and others.

Conversation with Christ: Lord, for you, charity is the highest value. You even spoke about it the night before your death. "I give you a new commandment: Love one another as I have loved you, so you also should love one another" (John 13:34). Christmas should enkindle charity in my heart. Let me see you in every person I meet today.

Resolution: I will perform a special act of charity today for someone at home, work or school.