

John the Baptist, whose martyrdom we commemorate at the end of this month (29th), is the character who pointed away from himself and towards Jesus – he was, and still is, the voice that cries ‘ prepare a way for the Lord, make his paths straight’. In the daily Liturgy of the Church we use the words of Zechariah, John’s Father, in his great prayer of thanksgiving for the birth of his child

As for you little child you shall be called a prophet of the Most High, you shall go ahead of the Lord to prepare his ways before him.

This is John’s vocation, his particular and unique calling in the plan of God – and he finds his sanctity precisely in this - being faithful, in all he said and did, to what God asked of him. He was to bring all his skills and abilities to the service of this call, in precisely the place and at the time that he was called to live. In this way, although John is unique and lived and ministered in a unique place and at a unique time, he can be a model and exemplar for you and for me, calling us to live the present moment always in light of the vocation given to us.

It might appear to others that when we keep the memory of the killing of someone – and in this case a particularly bloody one – we are in some way ‘lionising’ imprisonment and death, nothing could be further from the truth ! While we are pained and hurt by the inhumanity exhibited and the all too human emotions which lead to valuing the life of another individual as disposable and secondary, (remember Herod didn’t want to lose face in front of his guests) we are constantly inspired by the steadfastness and integrity of the Martyr who will, in his or her time, remain constant in living and proclaiming what they hold to be the most fundamental truth by which they live their lives.

Today, as you read these words, the call is being made to me and to you to also act as witness to what we believe; the Gospel gives us a vision of human dignity and worth and whether it is in our work-place or in the home, in the world of politics or in the world of science and development , we are asked to stay faithful to our vocation – the voice may appear to cry ‘in the wilderness’, but if the message is truly life-giving is important to be heard, then it should be cried aloud

To make known to his people their salvation...the loving kindness of the heart of our God.

Father Philip