

## **John the Baptist's Message To the Synagogue. The Miraculous Draught of Fishes**

Several of John's disciples, sent by their master, came from Machaerus to Capharnaum before the Sabbath began. They were some of the oldest and most confidential of his disciples, and among them were the brothers of Mary Cleophas, James, Sadoch, and Heliachim. They called the Elders and the committee appointed by the Pharisees into the porch before the synagogue, and there presented to them a long, narrow, conical roll of parchment. It was a letter from John, and contained in strong and expressive terms his testimony of Jesus.



While they were reading it and, somewhat perplexed, were discussing its contents among themselves, a numerous crowd assembled, to whom the messengers from John made known what their master had at Machaerus declared in a magnificent discourse before Herod, his own disciples, and a crowded audience. I saw the whole scene. When the disciples whom John had sent to Jesus at Mageddo had returned to their master, bringing with them the news of Jesus' miracles and teachings, as well as the persecution He endured from the Pharisees; when they repeated the various rumors afloat concerning Jesus and the complaints of many because He made no effort to release him (John), the Baptist felt himself urged once more to bear public witness to Him. This he did the more readily since all his efforts to induce Him to testify of Himself had been fruitless. Therefore he sent a request to Herod to allow him to address his disciples and all others who might desire to hear him. He brought forward as a plea in his own favor that he should soon be reduced to silence. Herod did not hesitate to grant the favor asked.

John's disciples and a crowd of people were admitted to the open square of the castle in which the Precursor was confined. Herod and his wicked wife sat on elevated seats surrounded by a numerous guard of soldiers. Then John was led forth from his prison and he began his discourse. Herod was quite pleased that the affair should come off, as he was glad of the opportunity to appease the people by letting them see how light and easy was the imprisonment to which John was subjected. Under the powerful inspiration of the Holy Ghost, the Baptist spoke of Jesus. He himself, he said, was sent only to prepare the ways for Him. He had never announced another than Jesus; but, stubborn as they were, the people would not acknowledge Him.

Had they then forgotten, he asked, what he had told them of Him? He would recall it to them clearly once more, for his own end was not far distant! At these last words, the whole assembly was moved, and many of John's disciples wept. Herod grew uneasy and embarrassed, for he had by no means resolved upon John's death, while his concubine dissembled her feelings as best she could. John continued zealously to speak. He recounted the wonders that took place at Jesus' baptism and declared Him the Beloved Son of God announced by the Prophets. His doctrine was the same as His Father's. What He did the Father also did, and no one can go to the Father excepting by Him, that is, by Jesus. And so he went on, refuting at length the reproaches of the Pharisees against Him, and especially that of His healing on the Sabbath day.

Everyone, he said, should keep holy the Sabbath, but the Pharisees profaned it, since they did not follow the teachings of Jesus, the teachings of the Son of Him who had instituted the Sabbath. John said many things of a similar nature, and proclaimed Jesus the One outside of whom no salvation could be found. Whoever believed not in Him and followed not His doctrine, would be condemned. He exhorted his disciples to turn to Jesus, not to remain standing blindly near Him on the threshold, but to enter into the Temple itself.

After his discourse, John sent several of his disciples with a letter to the synagogue of Capharnaum. In it he repeated all that he had said in testimony of Jesus, namely, that He was the Son of God and the fulfillment of the Promise, and that all His acts and teachings were right and holy. He refuted their objections, threatened them with God's judgments, and earnestly entreated them not to turn away from salvation. He commanded the disciples to read to the people another letter containing the same things, and to repeat to them all that he had just said. And now I saw John's disciples doing in Capharnaum what had been commanded them. An unusually large crowd was assembled, for the city was actually swarming with people on this Sabbath. There were here Jews from all quarters, and they listened with great joy to John's testimony of Jesus. Many gave utterance to loud acclamations, and their faith gained new strength.

The Pharisees had to give way to the multitude; they could not say a word. They shrugged their shoulders, shook their heads, and feigned to be well-disposed. They, however, asserted their own authority and told John's disciples that they would place no obstacle in Jesus' way if He refrained from

violating the laws and disturbing the public peace. He was, it was true, very wonderfully endowed; but it was theirs to maintain order, and there should be moderation in all things. John too was a good man, but shut up as he was in prison, he might easily form a wrong estimate of things; besides, he had never been much with Jesus.

And now the hour for the Sabbath struck, and all betook themselves to the synagogue, among them Jesus and the disciples. All listened with the greatest admiration to Jesus' words. He spoke of Joseph, sold by his brethren, and explained some passages from Amos that contained the menaces of God against the prevarications of Israel.<sup>1</sup> No one interrupted Him. The Pharisees listened with secret envy and astonishment that they could not repress. John's testimony, proclaimed so boldly to the public, had somewhat intimidated them.

But suddenly there arose fearful cries in the synagogue. Some people had brought in a man, violently possessed, belonging to Capharnaum. All of a sudden he made an assault on those around him, and attempted to tear them with his teeth. Jesus turned to the side whence the noise proceeded and said: "Silence! Take him!" The man became perfectly calm. They led him out of the synagogue, and he threw himself on the ground, looking quite intimidated. When Jesus had finished the Sabbath instructions and was about to withdraw, He went to where the man was lying and delivered him from the devil. After that He repaired with the disciples to Peter's near the lake, because there He could be more at peace. That night He went off by Himself to pray. Among all those that Jesus cured, I never saw any such as we call insane. They were all demoniacs and possessed.

The Pharisees were still together. They ran through all kinds of ancient writings relative to the Prophets, their manner of life, their teachings, and their actions. They dwelt especially upon Malachias, of whom many traditions were still extant, and compared what they found with the doctrine of Jesus. They were obliged to give Jesus the preference and admire His gifts, though they continued to criticize His teachings.

Next morning Jesus again taught in the synagogue before an immense crowd. Meanwhile Mary Cleophas had become so sick that the Blessed Virgin sent to Jesus to implore His help. Jesus then went to Peter's near the city where

Mary, the widow of Naim, and the sons and brothers of the sick woman were. The sorrow of little Simeon, then about eight years old, was quite remarkable. He was the youngest son of Mary Cleophas by her third husband, Jonas. Jonas was the young brother of Peter's father-in-law, who had been associated with him in the fishery, and who had died about half a year previously. Jesus went to the sick woman's bed, prayed, and laid His hands upon her. She was quite exhausted by fever. Then He grasped her by the hand and told her that she should no longer be sick. He directed them to give her to eat, and I saw them bringing her a cup of something, after which she had to eat a little. This He ordered to almost all the sick whom He cured, and I heard that it bore some signification to the Most Blessed Sacrament. As a general thing, Jesus blessed the food thus ordered.

The joy of her sons, and especially that of little Simeon, was indescribable when their mother arose cured and began to serve the other sick. As for Jesus, He went out immediately and began to cure the crowds of sick awaiting His coming in the sheds and buildings around the house. The sick of all kinds were gathered here, some of long duration looked upon as incurable, others apparently at the point of death. They had been brought from far and wide; some were even from Nazareth and had known Jesus in His early youth. I saw some carried to Him on the shoulders of others, looking more like corpses than creatures with life.

Some of John's disciples, they that had brought the writings, came here to Jesus to amuse them-selves and tell Him how indignant they were against Him because He made no effort to deliver their master from imprisonment. They told Him how rigorously they had fasted to obtain that God would move Him to free their master. Jesus comforted them and again praised John as the holiest of men. After that I heard them speaking with Jesus' disciples.

They inquired why Jesus did not Himself baptize. Their master, as they said, labored so zealously in that way. The disciples of Jesus answered in words like these: "John baptized, because he is the Baptist; but Jesus heals, because He is the Saviour," adding that John had never effected a miraculous cure. And now there came to Jesus some Scribes from Nazareth. They were very courteous, and besought Him once more to visit Nazareth. It looked as if they wanted to make Him forget what had happened there. But Jesus replied that no Prophet is esteemed in his own native city. He went then to the synagogue, where He delivered the Sabbath instructions till its close. On leaving the synagogue, He cured a blind man.

**Peter's wife presided over the domestic affairs of his house outside the city, while those of the other near the lake were directed by his mother-in-law and stepdaughter. Jesus went away to pray. Some of the disciples, they that had formerly been engaged in fishing, asked and obtained their Master's permission to go on board their barques and pass the night at their old occupation, since there was great need of fish to supply the stupendous multitude of strangers then present in Capharnaum. There were also many desirous of crossing to the other side of the lake.**

**The disciples spent the whole night in fishing, and next morning rowed many passengers across. Jesus meanwhile, with the rest of the disciples, busied Himself in distributing alms to the poor, to the sick that had been cured, and to needy travelers. This distribution was accompanied by instruction. With His own hands Jesus presented to each one that of which he had need, giving him at the same time words of consolation and advice. The alms consisted of clothing, various materials and covers, bread, and money. The holy women also gave alms from their own stock of provisions, as well as from the gifts bestowed upon them by certain benevolent persons. The disciples carried the bread and clothing in baskets, and made the distribution of them according to Jesus' orders.**

**Later in the day Jesus gave at Peter's fishery a discourse, which was attended by an immense crowd. The boats of Peter and Zebedee were lying not far from the shore. The disciples who had been fishing the night before were on the shore a little distant from the crowd, busy cleaning their nets. Jesus' little barque was lying near the larger ones. When the press became too great-for the level shore was very narrow at this point, a rocky mountain wall rising in the rear-Jesus made a sign to the fishermen, and they rowed His barque to where He was standing. While it was approaching, a Scribe from Nazareth, who had come hither with some of the sick whom Jesus had cured yesterday, said: "Master, I will follow Thee whithersoever Thou goest!" Jesus replied: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air nests, but the Son of Man has not where to lay His head."**

**The little barque pushed up to the shore, and Jesus entered it with some of His disciples. They rowed out a short distance from the land and then up and down, pausing sometimes here, sometimes there, while Jesus instructed the crowd on the shore. He related to them several parables of the Kingdom of**

God, among them that in which the Kingdom of Heaven is compared to a net cast into the sea, and that of the enemy who sowed cockle among the wheat. Evening was now closing. Jesus told Peter to row his boat out on the lake and to cast his nets to the fish. Peter, slightly vexed, replied: "We have labored all night and have taken nothing, but at Thy word I will let down the net," and he with the others entered their barques with their nets and rowed out on the lake. Jesus bade adieu to the crowd, and in His own little boat—wherein were Saturnin, Veronica's son, who had arrived the day before, and some of the other disciples—He followed after Peter's. He continued to instruct them, explaining similitudes, and when out on the deep water told them where to let down the nets. Then He left them and rowed over in His little boat to the landing place near Matthew's.

By this time it was night, and on the edge of the boats near the nets, torches were blazing. The fishers cast out the net, and rowed toward Chorozain, but soon they were unable to raise it. When at last, continuing to row eastward, they dragged it out of the deep into shallow water, it was so heavy that it gave way here and there. They inserted scoops formed like little boats into the net, seized the fish with their hands, and put them into smaller nets and into the casks that floated at the sides of their barques. Then they called to their companions on Zebedee's boat, who came and emptied a part of the net. They were actually terrified at the sight of the draught of fishes. Never before had such a thing happened to them. Peter was confounded. He felt how vain were all the cares they had hitherto bestowed upon their fishing, how fruitlessly they had labored, notwithstanding their trouble—and here, at a word from Him, they had caught at one draught more than they had ever done in months together.

When the net was relieved of part of its weight, they rowed to the shore, dragged it out of the water, and gazed awestruck at the multitude of fish it still contained. Jesus was standing on the shore. Peter, humbled and confused, fell at His feet and said: "Lord, depart from me, for I am a sinful man!" But Jesus said: "Fear not, Peter! From henceforth thou shalt catch men!" Peter, however, was quite overcome by sadness at the sight of his own unworthiness and vain solicitude for the things of this life. It was now between three and four in the morning, and it began to grow light.

The disciples, having put the fish into a place of safety, retired to their boats for a short sleep. Jesus, with Saturnin and Veronica's son, turned off to the east, and climbed the northern end of the mountain ridge upon whose southern extremity stood Gamala. Little hills and thickets were here scattered around. Jesus instructed Saturnin and Veronica's son how to pray and gave them several points upon which to reflect. Then He withdrew from them into solitude, while they rested, walked about, and prayed.

The disciples spent the next day in transporting their fish, a great portion of which was distributed to the poor, and to all they recounted the wonderful circumstances attending their labor. The pagans bought a great many, and many more were taken to Capharnaum and Bethsaida. All were now firmly convinced of the folly of solicitude for the nourishment of the body; for as the sea obeyed Jesus in the time of tempest, so did the fish obey Him. They were caught at His word.

Toward evening they went again to the landing place on the east side of the lake, and Jesus with the two disciples went with them toward Capharnaum. He repaired to Peter's house outside the city, and there until after night He cured by the light of torches many sick, men and women, who were quite abandoned on account of their maladies, which were considered unclean. Their friends had not dared to bring them openly with the other sick. Jesus cured them secretly by night in Peter's yard. There were some among them who for years had been separated from their friends, and who were in a most pitiable condition. All the rest of the night Jesus spent in prayer.