

Advent 3  
12/17/2023

## KNOW YOUR ROLE

Taylor Kemp is a now retired but very successful professional soccer player who during his major league career was received into the Catholic Church. In one of our Lighthouse Catholic CDs, he shares connections between being an athlete and living a Christian life.

The first of these connections is summed up in three words: *Know your role*. He said that new players can start out thinking that it's the job of the team to make them look good rather than for them to build up the team. He shared that in one game, he was playing the role of a defender with another teammate, a very capable, veteran teammate.

At one point Taylor, had an opportunity to move the ball forward and he took it, abandoning his teammate. Soon two players from the opposing team had the ball and were approaching the goal that now had only one defender. Afterwards, his teammate in very forceful language accompanied by forceful action told him, *Don't ever do that again*.

Taylor realized that as part of a team, his job wasn't to move the ball forward as much as he would like to do so, but to defend the goal and stay with his teammate. Know your role. Sound advice and not just for playing soccer but for living the Christian life.

Once again, this week we meet John the Baptist, this time introduced by John the Evangelist. John the Baptist was a man with a mission, a mission from God. His mission was to prepare people for the coming of the Lord; it was to testify to the light. John's mission was to testify to the light, not to be the light and John knew his role.

It would have been easy for John to portray himself as the messiah. People already wondered about that, but John knew who he was *and* who he was not. I am not the Christ. I am not Elijah. I am not the Prophet. John's role was to testify to the light, to prepare people for the coming of the light.

In John, we get an idea of what our role is as Christians. The word Christian literally means, a little Christ. Christians are those who through baptism, are joined to the dying and rising of Jesus, to his Paschal Mystery, who become members of the Body of Christ with Jesus as our head. Like John, we testify to the light but as members of his body, we seek to do something more, not just to testify to the light but to let the light of Christ shine through us no matter who we are, no matter where we are and no matter what we are doing.

At times our role changes, single people become married; married people become widowed; lay people get ordained and even within those broader categories, our role can change but it's important to always know what our role is, what our role is not and live out that role to the best of our ability. As with Taylor Kemp, at times we're called to sacrifice our own wants for the sake of a greater good, for the sake of the team.

John the Baptist not only knew his role, he lived it out well, with all his being. You never get the impression that John was just trying to get by doing the minimum. You never get the impression that John did anything halfway. John the Baptist lived a life of very intentional faith that expressed itself in passionate action. John called people out, he challenged them but to bring them closer to God. He didn't go with the flow but rather against the tide of his society. G.K. Chesterton remarked, *A dead thing goes with the stream, but only a living thing can go against it.*

Like John the Baptist, the Church cries out in the desert, often going against the tide. We proclaim the Gospel of Life amidst a culture of death. We cry out for peace amidst war and violence. We speak of economic justice and spiritual values in a consumerist and throwaway culture. We talk about the dignity of the human person against racism and exploitation. We speak of the dignity of human sexuality in a culture that both idolizes and trivializes it. We cry out with a noble message that can be compromised by some of its messengers but it remains a noble message.

John the Baptist was a herald of the Lord. With honesty and humility he prepared the way of the Lord and testified to the light. With lives of intentional faith, informed by the word of God, fortified by prayer, encouraged by one another, strengthened by the sacraments and nourished by the Eucharist, with lives marked by honesty and humility, may we prepare the way of the Lord and, in every *little way*, testify to the light who is Christ.

We're part of a team that we call the Church. May we know what our role is: to let the light of Christ shine through us in all we do and may we live it with passionate action.