

Thursday in the Second Week of Easter

April 15, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

Acts 5: 27–33; Psalm 34: 15–22; John 20:29; John 3:31–36

I met John Senette in the nave of Grace Church, Hammond, Louisiana, at the diocesan convention held there, I believe, in 1985. He was a graduate of Nashotah House and had preached at my new rector's, the then-Father Charles Jenkins', ordination to the priesthood. Father Senette had been rector of Grace Church, St. Francisville, a Mississippi River town north of Baton Rouge. When he sat down, Charles was on the other side of me. John had just finished his coursework for a Ph.D. at Tulane University. At some point, he leaned over me and said to Charles, "You ought to hire me so I can finish writing my dissertation." Charles looked at him with a big smile and said, "Good idea." The deal was done then and there. Later, John was dean of Christ Church Cathedral in New Orleans.

I always think of John when I hear certain passages of the New Testament. One of those occurs in today's gospel lesson. He used to joke that he and I were members of an organization called "BRACA." The name stood for the "Baton Rouge Assistants and Curates Association"—totally made up. Supposedly, our patron saint was Saint John the Baptist. The motto were these words from the Baptist: "He"—meaning the rector—"must increase and I"—meaning the assistant or curate—"must decrease."¹

I was blessed to serve at a very large Episcopal parish in Dallas for my first two years out of seminary—I was one of five full-time priests—and all of us were busy. In Baton Rouge, I was one of three full-time priests. Louise and Charles Jenkins have remained friends and mentors—coaches—for me. Bishop Jenkins death has been hard for me. He was 60; I am 67. He is the first close friend in my generation to die.

The learning never really stops, I think, in any profession—unless one chooses not to be open to what they had not known before. In our day, new technology is reshaping our lives. However, the power of an ideology can close us down to what is new and what may be right for us.

Christians regard John the Baptist as the bridge prophet between the old and the covenants. He introduces the Messiah by pointing his own disciples to Jesus and

¹ John 3:30.

saying, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”² By the next day, Andrew has found his brother Simon and said to him, “We have found the Messiah.”³ Andrew, Simon, Philip, and Nathanael are Jesus’ first disciples in this gospel. They are with him for two days before the wedding in Cana. The narrator, who is the evangelist tradition names “John,” comments, “This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.”⁴

The first part of today’s gospel lesson are the words of John the Baptist. His words conclude, again, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”⁵ The rest of the lesson is considered to be the words, the comments, of the evangelist. The best are these: “One who believes in the Son has eternal life.”⁶

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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² John 1:29.

³ John 1:41.

⁴ John 2:11.

⁵ John 3:30.

⁶ John 3:36a.