

Chapter
Three

Lecture
Four

COMMENTARY ON

THE GOSPEL OF ST. JOHN

St. Thomas Aquinas

Lectio 4

22 μετὰ ταῦτα ἦλθεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν, καὶ ἐκεῖ διέτριβεν μετ' αὐτῶν καὶ ἐβάπτιζεν. 23 ἦν δὲ καὶ ὁ Ἰωάννης βαπτίζων ἐν αἰνῶν ἐγγύς τοῦ Σαλείμ, ὅτι ὕδατα πολλὰ ἦν ἐκεῖ, καὶ παρεγίνοντο καὶ ἐβαπτίζοντο: 24 οὐπω γὰρ ἦν βεβλημένος εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν ὁ Ἰωάννης. 25 ἐγένετο οὖν ζήτησις ἐκ τῶν μαθητῶν Ἰωάννου μετὰ Ἰουδαίου περὶ καθαρισμοῦ. 26 καὶ ἦλθον πρὸς τὸν Ἰωάννην καὶ εἶπαν αὐτῷ, ῥαββί, ὃς ἦν μετὰ σοῦ πέραν τοῦ ἰορδάνου, ᾧ σὺ μεμαρτύρηκας, ἴδε οὗτος βαπτίζει καὶ πάντες ἔρχονται πρὸς αὐτόν.

Supra dominus tradidit doctrinam de spirituali regeneratione per verba; hic vero doctrinam illam implet per opera, baptizando. Et primo inducitur duplex Baptismus; secundo movetur quaestio de comparatione eorum, ibi *facta est ergo quaestio* et cetera. Circa primum duo facit. Primo inducitur Baptismus Christi; secundo Baptismus Ioannis, ibi *erat autem Ioannes baptizans* et cetera.

Dicit ergo primo: *post haec*, scilicet quae de doctrina spiritualis regenerationis praemissa sunt, *venit Iesus, et discipuli eius in terram Iudaeam*. Sed hic est quaestio litteralis: nam supra dixerat

LECTURE 4

22 After this Jesus and his disciples came to Judean territory; he stayed there with his disciples and was baptizing. 23 But John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, where the water was plentiful, and people kept coming and were baptized. 24 John, of course, had not yet been thrown into prison. 25 A controversy arose between the disciples of John and the Jews concerning purification. 26 They went to John and said to him, "Rabbi, the man who was with you across the Jordan, the one of whom you have given testimony, he is here baptizing, and all the people are flocking to him."

497 Above, the Lord gave us his teaching on spiritual regeneration in words, here he completes his teaching through action, by baptizing. First, two kinds of baptism are mentioned. Secondly, a question about their relationship is raised (v 25). As to the first, two things are done. Mention is first made of the baptism of Christ. Secondly, of the baptism of John.

498 He says first, **After this**, i.e., the teaching on spiritual regeneration, **Jesus and his disciples came to Judean territory**. There is a question here about the literal meaning. For

Evangelista, quod dominus de Galilaea venerat in Ierusalem, quae est Iudaea terra, ubi instruxerat Nicodemum. Quomodo ergo post instructionem Nicodemi, venit in Iudaeam, cum iam esset ibi?

Ad quod est duplex responsio: nam secundum Bedam, Christus post verba Nicodemi, ivit in Galilaeam, et ibi aliquandiu moratus rediit in Iudaeam: et ideo cum dicitur *post haec venit Iesus*, non est intelligendum quod immediate venerit in Iudaeam post verba Nicodemi. Alio modo, secundum Chrysostomum, intelligendum est quod post haec immediate venerit in terram Iudaeam. Christus enim volebat praedicare ubi multitudo conveniebat, ut multi converterentur; Ps. XXXIX, 10: *annuntiavi iustitiam tuam in Ecclesia magna*. Et infra c. XVIII, 20: *ego palam locutus sum* et cetera. Duo autem loca erant in Iudaea, ad quae confluebat multitudo Iudaeorum, scilicet Ierusalem, ad quam ibant ad festa, et Iordanis, ad quem concurrebant propter praedicationem et Baptismum Ioannis. Et ideo dominus ista duo loca frequentans, statim completis diebus festis in Ierusalem, quae est in una parte Iudaeae, venit in aliam partem Iudaeae, ubi Ioannes baptizabat, scilicet in Iordanem.

Moraliter autem Iudaea interpretatur confessio, ad quam venit Iesus, quia Christus confitentes sua peccata, vel divinam laudem, visitat; Ps. CXIII, 2: *facta est Iudaea sanctificatio eius*. Et illic moratur, quia tales non transitorie visitat; infra XIV, 23: *ad eum veniemus et mansionem apud eum faciemus*. Et illic baptizat, idest purgat a peccatis: quia nisi quis peccata sua confiteatur, remissionem non consequitur; Prov. XXVIII, 13: *qui abscondit scelera sua, non dirigitur*.

Deinde cum dicit *erat autem et Ioannes baptizans in Aenon*, introducit Evangelista Baptisma Ioannis: et circa hoc quatuor facit. Primo enim ponit personam baptizantis; secundo locum Baptismi; tertio fructum; quarto tempus.

above, the Evangelist had said that the Lord had come from Galilee to Jerusalem, which is in Judean territory, where he taught Nicodemus. So how, after teaching Nicodemus, can he come into Judea, since he was already there?

Two answers are given to this. According to Bede, after his discussion with Nicodemus, Christ went to Galilee, and after remaining there for a time, returned to Judea. And so **After this Jesus and his disciples came to Judean territory**, should not be understood to mean that he came into Judea immediately after his talk with Nicodemus. Another explanation, given by Chrysostom, is that he did come into the territory of Judea immediately after this discussion: for Christ wanted to preach where the people gathered, so that many might be converted: "I have declared your justice in the great assembly" (Ps 39:10); "I have spoken openly to the world" (below 18:20). Now there were two places in Judea where the Jewish people gathered: Jerusalem, where they went for their feasts, and the Jordan, where they gathered on account of John's preaching and his baptism. And so the Lord used to visit both places; and after the feast days were over in Jerusalem, which is in one part of Judea, he went to another part, to the Jordan, where John was baptizing.

499 As for the moral sense, Judea means "confession," to which Jesus came, for Christ visits those who confess their sins or speak in praise of God: "Judea became his sanctuary" (Ps 113:2). He stayed there, because he did not make a merely temporary visit: "We will come to him, and make our abode with him," as it says below (14:23). **And was baptizing**, i.e., cleansing from sin; because unless one confesses his sins he does not obtain forgiveness: "He who hides his sins will not prosper" (Prov 28:13).

500 Then when he says, **But John also was baptizing**, the Evangelist presents the baptism of John. And in regard to this he does four things. First, he presents the person who is baptizing. Secondly, the place of the baptism. Thirdly, its fruit. Fourthly, the time.

Persona baptizans est loannes; et ideo dicit *erat autem loannes baptizans*. Sed hic est quaestio: quia cum Baptisma loannis ordinaretur ad Baptismum Christi, videtur quod, veniente Baptismate Christi, loannes cessare debuerit a baptizando, sicut veniente veritate, cessat figura. Ad hoc est triplex responsio. Una, quantum ad personam Christi: nam loannes baptizavit ut Christus baptizaretur ab eo. Nec oportebat quod solus Christus ab eo baptizaretur, ne Baptismus loannis ex huius singularitate, melior Christi Baptismate videretur: et ideo expediens fuit ut alii ante Christum baptizarentur a loanne, quia antequam Christi doctrina publicata est, necessarium erat homines praeparari ad Christum Baptismo loannis. Unde secundum hoc, ita se habet Baptismus loannis ad Baptismum Christi sicut catechismus, in quo baptizandi instruuntur de fide et praeparantur ad Baptismum, se habet ad verum Baptisma. Necessarium etiam fuit ut postquam Christus baptizatus fuerat a loanne, alii baptizarentur ab eo, ne loannis Baptisma reprobandum videretur; sicut etiam non statim veniente veritate cessavit usus legalium, sed, secundum Augustinum, licuit Iudaeis determinato tempore legalia servare.

Alio modo quantum ad personam loannis: nam si loannes statim cum Christus baptizare coepit, destitisset a Baptismo, potuisset credi, quod hoc fecisset ex invidia, vel ira. Et quia, ut dicitur Rom. XII, 17: *providere debemus bona non solum coram Deo, sed etiam coram omnibus hominibus*: ideo loannes non statim cessavit.

Alio modo quantum ad discipulos loannis, qui iam incipiebant se zelotypos habere ad Christum, et ad discipulos eius, quia baptizabant. Unde si statim loannes totaliter baptizare cessasset, dimisisset discipulos suos in maiori zelo et controversia contra Christum et discipulos eius. Iam enim etiam loanne baptizante, ipsi aegre ferebant Baptismum Christi: quod patet ex sequentibus. Et ideo non statim cessavit; I Cor. VIII, 9: *videte ne forte haec licentia vestra offendiculum fiat infirmis*.

501 John is the person who is baptizing, so he says, **John also was baptizing**. There is a question about this: Since John's baptism was ordained to the baptism of Christ, it seems that John should have stopped baptizing when Christ started to baptize, just as the symbol does not continue when the truth comes. Three reasons are given for this. The first is in relation to Christ, for John baptized in order that Christ might be baptized by him. But it was not fitting that John baptize just Christ; otherwise, on this point alone, it might seem that John's baptism was superior to Christ's. Accordingly, it was expedient that John baptize others before Christ, because before Christ's teaching was to be made public it was necessary that men be prepared for Christ by John's baptism. In this way, the baptism of John is related to the baptism of Christ as the catechesis or religious instruction given to prospects to teach and prepare them for baptism is related to the true baptism. It was likewise important that John baptize others after he had baptized Christ, so that John's baptism would not seem to be worthless. For the same reason, the practice of the ceremonies of the old law was not abolished as soon as the truth came, but as Augustine says, the Jews could lawfully observe them for a time.

The second reason relates to John. For if John had stopped baptizing at once after Christ began baptizing, it might have been thought that he stopped out of envy or anger. And because, as the Apostle says, "We ought to look after what is good, not only before God, but also before all men" (Rom 12:17), this is the reason why John did not stop at once.

The third reason relates to John's disciples, who were already beginning to act like zealots toward Christ and his disciples, because they were baptizing. So if John had entirely stopped from baptizing, it would have provoked his disciples to an even greater zeal and opposition to Christ and his disciples. For even while John continued baptizing, they were hostile to Christ's baptism, as later events showed. And so John did not stop at once: "Take care that your freedom does not become a hindrance to those who are weak," as is said in 1 Corinthians (8:9).

Locus autem Baptismi erat *in Aennon iuxta Salim: quia aquae multae erant ibi*. Salim alio nomine dicitur Salem quae est villa, unde Melchisedech rex fuit. Et dicitur hic Salim, quia apud Iudaeos, lector pro voluntate uti potest vocalibus litteris in medio dictionum: unde, sive dicatur Salim, sive Salem, non refert apud Iudaeos. Hoc autem quod addit *quia aquae multae erant ibi* ponit ad exponendum hoc nomen loci, scilicet Aennon, quod idem est quod aqua.

Fructus autem Baptismi est remissio peccatorum; et ideo dicit *et veniebant et baptizabantur*, idest mundabantur: quia, ut dicitur Matth. III, 5, Lc. III, 7 multitudo magna ibat ad Ioannem.

Tempus ponitur ibi *nondum enim missus fuerat Ioannes in carcerem*: quod ideo dicit, ut det intelligere quod ipse incepit narrationem de factis Christi ante alios Evangelistas. Alii namque inceperunt narrare opera Christi solum a tempore incarcerationis Ioannis. Unde dicitur Matth. IV, 12: *cum audisset Iesus, quia Ioannes traditus esset, secessit in Galilaeam*. Et ideo, quia omnia facta Christi ante Ioannis incarcerationem praeterierant, Ioannes, qui ultimo Evangelium scripsit, defectum hunc supplevit; et hoc insinuat, cum dicit *nondum enim missus fuerat Ioannes in carcerem*.

Sed nota, quod dispensatione divina factum est ut Ioannes, Christo baptizante, non diu baptizaret et praedicaret, ne ex hoc fieret schisma in populo; quamquam hoc ei aliquo tempore permissum fuerit, ne reprobandus videretur, ut supra dictum est. Sic etiam dispensatione factum est ut post praedicationem fidei, et conversionem fidelium, templum totaliter destrueretur, ut videlicet tota devotio, et spes fidelium traheretur ad Christum.

502 The place of his baptism was **at Aenon near Salim, where the water was plentiful**. Another name for Salim is Salem, which is the village from which the king Melchizedek came. It is called Salim here because among the Jews a reader may use any vowel he chooses in the middle of his words; hence it made no difference to the Jews whether it was pronounced Salim or Salem. He added, **where the water was plentiful**, to explain the name of this place, i.e., **Aenon**, which is the same as “water.”

503 The fruit of his baptism is the remission of sins; thus he says, **people kept coming and were baptized**, i.e., cleansed: for as is stated in Matthew (3:5) and in Luke (3:7), great crowds came to John.

504 The time is indicated when he says, **John had not yet been thrown into prison**. He says this so that we may know that he began his narrative of Christ’s life before the other Evangelists. For the others began their account only from the time of John’s imprisonment. So Matthew (4:12) says: “When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew into Galilee.” And so, because they had passed over the things that Christ did before John’s imprisonment, John, who was the last to write a Gospel, supplied these omissions. He suggests this when he says: **John had not yet been thrown into prison**.

505 Note that by divine arrangement it came about that when Christ began to baptize, John did not continue his own baptizing and preaching for very long, in order not to create disunion among the people. But he was granted a little time so that it would not seem that he deserved to be repudiated, as was mentioned before. Again, by God’s arrangement, it came about that after the faith had been preached and the faithful converted, the temple was utterly destroyed, in order that all the devotion and hope of the faithful could be directed to Christ.

Deinde cum dicit *facta est autem quaestio* etc., inducitur quaestio Baptismatum: et primo proponitur ipsa quaestio; secundo relatio quaestionis ad Ioannem, ibi *et venerunt ad Ioannem*; tertio ponitur quaestionis determinatio, ibi *respondit Ioannes, et dixit eis*.

Quia ergo duo baptizabant, ut dictum est, scilicet Christus et Ioannes, discipuli ipsius Ioannis pro magistro suo zelantes, occasionem dissidii sumpserunt. Et hoc est quod dicit *facta est quaestio*, id est controversia, *ex discipulis Ioannis*, ipsis scilicet primo moventibus hanc quaestionem, *cum Iudaeis*: quos reprehendebant discipuli Ioannis, eo quod ad Christum magis currebant propter miracula quae faciebat, quam ad Ioannem, qui miraculum nullum faciebat. Et quaestio ista facta est *de purificatione*, id est de Baptismo. Causam autem unde invidabant discipuli Ioannis, et controversiam movebant, sumpserunt ex eo quod Ioannes illos quos baptizabat, mittebat ad Christum; Christus vero quos baptizabat non mittebat ad Ioannem. Ex quo videbatur, et forte Iudaei dicebant, Christum maiorem esse Ioanne: et ideo isti nondum spirituales, de Baptismo contendunt cum Iudaeis; I Cor. III, 3: *cum enim sit inter vos zelus et contentio, nonne carnales estis?*

Sed motam quaestionem referunt ad Ioannem; et ideo dicit *et venerunt ad Ioannem*. Et si attenditur diligenter, conati sunt commovere Ioannem contra Christum. Similes isti sunt bilinguibus et susurronibus; Eccli. c. XXVIII, 15: *susurro et bilinguis maledictus multos enim turbabit pacem habentes*.

Proponunt autem quatuor, quae commotionem in animo Ioannis contra Christum causarent. Primo enim commemorant humilitatem status Christi praeteriti; secundo beneficium a Ioanne impensum; tertio officium assumptum a Christo; quarto detrimentum quod provenit Ioanni ex Christi officio.

Humilitatem autem status commemorant, cum dicunt *qui erat tecum*, quasi unus de discipulis; non autem tu cum illo, sicut cum magistro:

506 Then when he says, **A controversy arose**, he brings in the issue of the two baptisms. First, the issue is mentioned. Secondly, it is brought to John's attention (v 26). Thirdly, the issue is resolved.

507 Because both John and Christ were baptizing, the disciples of John, out of zeal for their teacher, started a controversy over this. And this is what he says, A controversy arose, i.e., a dispute, **between the disciples of John**, who were the first to raise the issue, **and the Jews**, whom the disciples of John had rebuked for preferring Christ, because of the miracles he did, to John, who did not do any miracles. The issue was **concerning purification**, i.e., baptizing. The cause of their envy and the reason why they started the controversy was the fact that John sent those he baptized to Christ, but Christ did not send those he baptized to John. It seemed from this, and perhaps the Jews even said so, that Christ was greater than John. Thus, the disciples of John, having not yet become spiritual, quarreled with the Jews over the baptisms. "While there is envy and fighting among you, are you not carnal?" (1 Cor 3:3).

508 They referred this issue to John; hence he says, **They went to John**. If we examine this closely, we see that they were trying to incite John against Christ. Indeed, they are like the gossip and the double-tongued: "Those who gossip and are double-tongued are accursed, for they disturb many who are at peace" (Sir 28:15).

So they bring up four things calculated to set John against Christ. First, they recall the previous unimportant status of Christ. Secondly, the good John did for him. Thirdly, the role which Christ took on. Fourthly, the loss to John because of Christ's new role.

509 They recall Christ's unimportance when they say, **the man who was with you**, as one of your disciples; and not the one you were with

nam si alicui maiori honor exhibeatur, non est tanta causa invidiae; sed tunc quis invidet, quando minori se magis honor exhibetur; Eccle. X, 7: *vidi servos in equis sedentes, et principes ambulantes super terram quasi servos*; Job XIX, 16: *servum meum vocavi, et non respondit*. Quia plus turbatur dominus aliquis de rebellionem servi et subditi, quam alicuius alterius.

Secundo commemorantes beneficium impensum a Ioanne, non dicunt quem tu baptizasti, quia in hoc confessi fuissent magnificentiam Christi, quae in Baptismo demonstrata est, et descensum spiritus sancti super eum in specie columbae, et vocem patris sibi factam; sed dicunt *cui tu testimonium perhibuisti*; idest, quem tu clarum et circumspicuum fecisti, talia tibi rependere audet, quod multum concitat exacerbationem; Ps. XL, 10: *qui edebat panes meos, magnificavit super me supplantationem*. Sed quia quaerentes propriam gloriam, et intendentes lucrum proprium in suo officio, dolent si alius officium illud assumat.

Ideo, tertio, isti addunt etiam, quod Christus Ioannis officium sibi assumpsit, cum dicunt: *ecce hic baptizat*; idest, officium tuum exercet: quod multum concitat ad turbationem. Nam communiter videmus hic, homines eiusdem artis insidiosae et invidiae se habere ad invicem. Figulus figulo invidet, non autem fabro. Sic etiam doctores proprium honorem quaerentes, dolent si alius veritatem docet; contra quos dicit Gregorius: mens pii pastoris optat ut veritatem, quam solus docere non sufficit, alii doceant. Sic et Moyses, Num. XI, 29: *quis det ut omnis hic populus prophetet?*

Sed non solum sufficiebat istis concitare Ioannem; sed quod magis movet, referunt, scilicet detrimentum quod Ioanni ex assumpto officio a Christo provenire videbatur; quod quarto exponunt, cum dicunt *et omnes veniunt ad eum*, qui scilicet ad te venire solebant: quia te dimisso et contempto, omnes ad Baptismum eius currunt. Quod

as your teacher. For there is no good reason for envy if honor is shown to one who is greater; rather, envy is aroused when honor is given to an inferior: "I have seen slaves on horses, and princes walking like slaves" (Ecc 10:7); "I called my servant, and he did not answer me" (Job 19:16). For a master is more disturbed at the rebellion of a servant and a subject than of anyone else.

510 Secondly, they remind John of the good he did Christ. Thus they do not say, "the one whom you baptized," because they would then be admitting the greatness of Christ which was shown during his baptism when the Holy Spirit came upon him in the form of a dove and in the voice of the Father speaking to him. So they say, **the one of whom you have given testimony**, i.e., we are very angry that the one you made famous and admired dares to repay you in this way: "The one who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me" (Ps 40:10). They said this because those who seek their own glory and personal profit from their office become dejected if their office is taken over by someone else

511 And so thirdly, they even add that Christ took over John's office for himself, when they say, **he is here baptizing**, i.e., he is exercising your office; and this also disturbed them very much. For we generally see that men of the same craft are envious and underhanded with respect to one another; a potter envies another potter, but does not envy a carpenter. So, even teachers, who are seeking their own honor, become sad if another teaches the truth. In opposition to them, Gregory says: "The mind of a holy pastor wishes that others teach the truth which he cannot teach all by himself." So also Moses: "Would that all the people might prophesy," as we read in Numbers (11:29).

512 Yet they were not satisfied with merely disturbing John, rather they report something that should really excite him, that is, the loss that John seemed to be having because of the office Christ took over. They give this when they say: **and all the people are flocking to him**, i.e., the ones who used to come to you. In other words, they have rejected and

autem ante consueverant ire ad Ioannem, patet ex testimonio Matth. XI, 7: *quid existis in desertum videre?* et cetera. Tali invidia movebantur Pharisei contra Christum; unde dicebant, infra XII, 19: *ecce totus mundus post eum vadit*. Sed ex his Ioannes non fuit motus contra Christum: non enim erat arundo vento agitata, ut dicitur Matt. XI, 7. Et hoc patet ex responsione Ioannis, quae sequitur in determinatione quaestionis sibi delatae.

disowned you, and now are all going to his baptism. It is clear from Matthew (11:7) that they used to go to John: "What did you go into the desert to see?" The same envy affected the Pharisees against Christ; so they said: "Look, the whole world has gone after him" (below 12:19). However, all this did not set John against Christ, for he was not a reed swaying in the wind, and this is clear from John's answer to their question.
