

GOSPEL PEARLS

More wretched than St. Francis

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There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light. And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ." And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No." So they said to him, "Who are you? We need to give an answer to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" He said, "I

am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said." (Now they had been sent from the Pharisees.) They asked him, "Then why are you baptizing, if you are neither the Christ, nor Elijah, nor the Prophet?" John answered them, "I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I am not worthy to untie." These things took place in Bethany across the Jordan, where John was baptizing. (John 1: 6-8; 19-28)

St. John the Baptist preached penance. In fact, first of all, we must not feel we are God's equals. Nothing we do can ever repay what He has done for us. Only by acknowledging our debt to Him may we be able to humbly and sincerely ask for His forgiveness. In this way, all the virtues will improve in us, without us feeling we are better than others. St. Francis said that if God had found someone more wretched than Him, He would have chosen him in order to demonstrate just how even more powerful He really is.