

Homily by Mgr Vincent Dollmann – Froyennes, June 24, 2026

"Brothers and sisters, what a blessing for us to meet and gather on this day of the great solemnity of the birth of Saint John the Baptist—the St. Patron's name of the founder of the Congregation of the Holy Union. For the Church, this figure remains as relevant today as ever. From the earliest times, the Church remembered not only John the Baptist's martyrdom at the end of August, but also his birth. Aside from Christ, there are only two others whose earthly birth we celebrate: the Virgin Mary and John the Baptist. Through his words, but above all through who he is, **John the Baptist shows us the beauty of belonging to God, the beauty of consecration to God, and the invitation to continually renew this yes to God.**

We heard in the Prophet Isaiah how God says: *"I send you as a servant."* But even that word is too limited. It will be even more beautiful—the promise you carry at the dawn of a new age. This name appears first on the lips of the Virgin Mary: *"I am the servant of the Lord."* Mary understood that what is most important is not first the word "servant," but "of the Lord." She understood, through the long journey of the people of God to discover His will, that it is first about this new, personal relationship with each of us. A relationship that grants us access to knowing Him and, above all, access to a personal relationship with Him. And this is what John the Baptist carries—he who rejoices and leaps in his mother's womb at the approach of the Lord carried by Mary during the Visitation.

For us, this is good news. We live in a Church at times, but also in a society, that seeks paths other than those of promise and hope, believing that ultimately everything must be settled by purely horizontal, immediate decisions based on efficiency and technology. In France right now, our elected representatives are debating for the last time on the question of euthanasia. This is a false path for society, for it would enclose human life within a purely earthly space and reduce the human person to a mere segment of existence, with some deciding whether it is still livable or not.

However, we are very far from this feast, which invites us instead to rejoice in the way Jesus looks upon each of us through John the Baptist, who prepared His way. May this celebration first make us give thanks for this gift—for the gift of God's presence in our lives. Naturally, this is realized in a very concrete way through baptism. And when we renew our religious vows, it is primarily within the grace of that baptism. **Consecrated life reminds every one of us of the beauty of belonging to God**, of being in God's hands, and of knowing that the life God gives us can never be taken away by anyone. The life God gives us is ours to welcome and to bring to fruition.

To enter more deeply into the joy of this gift received from God, into a life of personal communion with Him, we must perhaps, like John the Baptist, accept a certain conversion in our earthly journey—even a double conversion. For John the Baptist, like all of us, remained human. Even when he felt God was by his side and embraced God's plan, he faced the temptation to think that what we achieve in the service of the Gospel—within the different charisms of our congregations and our various life paths—depends on us. Today's world,

more technical and focused on efficiency, sometimes leads us to think that purely structural changes are enough for God to manifest His presence even better. **Yet, it is a whole conversion that we are called to live.**

John the Baptist too, no doubt in his youth and in how he preached at first, thought everything rested on the Word he spoke, as people came to admire and listen to him in the desert because his voice was so strong and his message so compelling. But slowly, step by step, he had to learn that it did not depend on his own strength or his own calculations, but on the grace received at the beginning. True conversion, so that God can act in our lives and bring life to humanity, means becoming channels, becoming true precursors where God guides the path of our lives.

We see this at the end of his life, when from the depth of his prison, John the Baptist asks: *"Is Jesus truly the Messiah, since I announced someone coming to change the world?"* Jesus manifests this through divine mercy, by respecting everyone, reaching out to the poorest, taking time, and performing works of mercy. And John the Baptist receives Jesus' answer when he sends delegations; Jesus tells him, referencing the prophet Isaiah: *"The lame walk, the blind see, and the jubilee year is proclaimed."* John the Baptist can thus walk his path to the very end and truly be a precursor at the moment of his death, which announces the death of Jesus for the salvation of humanity—not through a dramatic display, but through the rejection of the Cross.

Jesus brought life to the world, and we are still witnesses to this today and are called to be witnesses. May we, through John the Baptist—who at the beginning of his life offers this spontaneous thanksgiving before the divine life approaching him in his mother's womb—and together with John the Baptist, who recognized the Messiah, Jesus, his cousin, among his own, take this step. May we, with John the Baptist, who helped his own disciples go toward Jesus, recognize this coming life and bear witness to it through our thanksgiving.

Let us ask the Lord to inspire all our projects and all the perspectives we have for the congregation worldwide, inspiring them first through this thanksgiving for what He is already doing in our own lives. **Faithful to the charism of Debrabant, let us go to those who need this light and this hope of life the most.** May it also be received, always through us, among the poorest and humblest, because they still retain that capacity for wonder. May we learn from them—we who represent so many institutions around the world, so many achievements, and each one of us, from what the Lord is doing through others. May we also present ourselves today alongside those who are given to us, whom we serve, accompany, and seek to educate. May we make them present through our prayer of thanksgiving today. Yes, may the consecrated life of the Holy Union sisters continue in this testimony: God is the One who brings the light of life, and God alone can unite human hearts to His own Fatherly heart and make them beat as one in an eternal *"I love you,"* in an eternal love that begins right here on earth. Amen."