



Words and Ways

by Fr Frank B. Freeman, sdb

A visiting speaker, a revolutionary if not by reputation certainly by name, was addressing a class of senior students on the need for drastic social reform and the need for fire-eating leaders to foment it. "Tell me," he said, "Is there any one of today's leaders you would die for?" To his disappointment silence reigned in the classroom. Until one student spoke up, "No, but I am looking for someone to live for". A lively discussion broke out among the students, oblivious now to the visiting speaker, as to how to discover such a person to live for. Names of recent revolutionary leaders, who had strutted the world stage, were thrown up for discussion but so many of them, after enjoying popular support, proved to have feet of clay. On obtaining power, how quickly they adopted rich and opulent life styles. Their self-aggrandising ways belied their fine words to the masses: certainly not the type worth living for, let alone dying for.

The visiting speaker felt he had been sidelined. In order to regain their attention he put the question, "and how do you propose to discover this real person you want to live for?" "Easy," said the same student, "Let's see how he really lives behind the façade of his revolutionary talk. Let's see if his ways match his words".

History is full of such leaders not worth dying for and also leaders well worth living for: the New Testament shows us two such leaders.

John the Baptist, that fiery revolutionary, whose mettle was tempered in the hardness of the desert environment over long years, was no dissembler. His revolutionary call to repentance matched his lifestyle. Naturally enthusiastic young men were attracted to him as the fulfilment of their ideals for a better society, a man they could live for.

But one day their leader did an uncharacteristic thing for one gathering disciples for a mission. He pointed out one greater than himself who was worth living for. "Behold the Lamb of God... One greater than I. I am not worthy to undo his shoe straps". Now some of his disciples, attracted by the idea

