

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2017

The readings of this beginning of this ordinary time talk about the mission of the servant of God. They show the scope of that mission and invite us to recognize in Jesus Christ the savior of the world.

The first reading of the prophet Isaiah talks about the vocation of the servant of God. It shows how he was formed since the womb and destined to bring the glory and the salvation of God to the nations. It also shows that he was destined to be an agent of unification and of restoration of God's people.

What is behind this text is the idea that God's servant is an instrument of divine purpose and the mediator of his word of salvation to the world. Another idea is that those God chooses to work for him, he predestined also so that they might be fit for the mission he entrusts to them. The last idea is the truth that anytime that God's servant fulfills adequately his mission, it is God who is praised through his work.

This text allows us to understand the stakes of today's Gospel as it speaks of the witness of John the Baptist about Jesus. First of all, the Gospel says that when John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him, he recognized him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

It also gives the reason why John came to baptize so that the people of Israel might recognize him. After that, it gives the witness of John the Baptist who declared that Jesus was bigger than him because he existed before me.

Finally, the Gospel states that it was at the moment of his baptism when the Spirit descended on him and following the injunction God gave to him that John recognized Jesus.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about Jesus as the power of God's forgiveness to the world. What do I want to say with that? Let me explain.

In fact, John the Baptist calls Jesus "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world". This is something paradoxical. Why? Because, everybody knows well that in the animal world, a lamb is a very fragile, weak and defenseless animal in comparison to the strength of great carnivores like lions, tigers, leopards, etc.

If that is the case, why is John calling Jesus the Lamb? What does he mean with this title? In order to understand what John has in mind, we have to go back, through the centuries, to the celebration of Passover at the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt and to the Jewish liturgy of sacrifice as it was offered in the temple.

What is it about? First of all, let us examine what was happening in the temple. In fact, the worship in the temple was a mandatory rite that every Jew had to perform regularly in order to be in order with God. For that reason, the liturgy was organized around the sacrifice to be offered to God in thanksgiving for the blessings received and for the forgiveness of sins.

In order to fulfill that duty in the temple, the book Exodus 29: 38-42 recommended that a lamb might be offered in sacrifice. The immolation of the lamb on the altar of the temple satisfied that need of forgiveness and restored the people in their friendship with God. That had to be repeated regularly as long there was a need for forgiveness of sin.

In that sense, when John the Baptist presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, what he wants to say is that Jesus is the replacement of all the sacrifices offered in the temple for the forgiveness of sins. Therefore, Jesus is the one who brings peace between God and the world. No more sacrifice is needed, because his own blood shared on the cross will be given for the salvation of the world. That is why Jesus is the only sacrifice that can deliver men and women from their transgression of the Law and their sins.

Second, by presenting Jesus as the Lamb of God, another event to which John the Baptist refers, is certainly the celebration of Passover. In fact, we know what happened the night the Hebrews left Egypt. Exodus 12 says that the Israelites sacrificed the lamb according to the instructions given to them by Moses and Aaron. They put the blood of the killed animal at the doorposts of their house as a sign of their belonging to the people of God.

When that night the angel of God passed by and killed the first-born of the Egyptians, all the Hebrews were spared from death. The blood of the Lamb delivered them from destruction and reminded the angel that they were allies of God. Because of the importance of this event, they had to repeat it continually for generations.

In that perspective, as the Hebrews were delivered from death by the blood of the Lamb, John the Baptist sees in Jesus a true Lamb whose blood purifies the world from sin and death. Therefore, Jesus is the only one whose blood purifies us, obtains us life and destroys our sins.

What sins? The sin of the world that Jesus takes away, indeed, represents something bigger than our personal faults. It is the darkness of the human heart and the inhuman situation in which we participate, sometimes without realizing it. It is the evil that fights everything that is good so that the bad acts may triumph through killing, robberies, barbarism, discrimination, lack of respect of human dignity and exploitation of the weak.

In all those circumstances, the role of Jesus, therefore, is to set us free, to allow us to change our mind and our heart, to receive God's love and to love one another as God's children. Jesus takes away sin by giving us the principle of a new attitude, by creating a new context of peace in which we can live and by giving us a new heart and new spirit, capable of distinguishing the bad from the good.

At the beginning of this New year, let us come to Jesus and ask him to take away our sins and to allow us to live like children of light. May God bless you all!

Isaiah 49: 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3, 5-6; John 1: 29-34



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