

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time A2023

From the beginning of creation, God had a project of salvation for the world and for the human race. To fulfill that project, God has raised up throughout history his servants and sent them to act on his behalf.

Each servant has been chosen by God since the womb of his mother to be an instrument of divine purpose and the mediator of his word of salvation to the world. Each servant has been an agent of unification and the restoration of God's people. Anytime that God's servant has fulfilled adequately his mission, it was God who was glorified through his work, as we heard in the first reading.

That project of God has attained its climax with the sending of Jesus into the world to be our Savior. Unlike the other servants who came before him, Jesus has preexisted to the creation of the world. Saint John the Evangelist says that "He was in the beginning with God. (He is God). All things came to be through him, and without him nothing came to be." (John 1:2-3)

When John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him for baptism, he exclaimed: "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." He recognized him as the power of God's forgiveness to the world and in whom all are pardoned and established in good relationship with God. John the Baptist confessed also that Jesus was anterior and superior to him.

To better understand why John calls Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of world, we need, first, to clarify the concept of sin. What is sin? Sin is anything that prevents us from living an authentic relationship with God and with our fellows. Sin is anything that prevents the flourishing of God's life within us. Any compulsion, behavior, character, attitude or conduct that pushes us to make choices that are not in conformity with God's will and do not flow from the inspiration of God's Spirit is sin. The reality of sin is around us, in our hearts and our minds.

How does Jesus take the sin away? He does it the way we take darkness away by turning on the light. He does it the way we take loneliness away by accepting companionship. He does it the way we take hatred away by accepting to love, etc. For sure, this is not an automatic process; everything depends on us and our will. We can choose to live in the dark while there is the possibility of light. We can choose to remain isolated instead of being involved with people. We can continue to hate instead of loving.

In other words, Jesus shows us the way in which we have to walk in order to avoid sin. Jesus shows us what we have to do in order to get rid of sin. Jesus gives us his love so that we might love like him. Jesus gives us his Spirit so that by imitating him, we live without sin.

Now let me finish with this question: why is John calling Jesus the Lamb? What does he mean by that? To understand what John has in mind, we have to go back to the celebration of Passover and to the Jewish liturgy of sacrifice offered in the temple.

In fact, the cult in the temple was a mandatory rite that every Jew has to perform regularly in order to be in order with his God. The liturgy was organized around the sacrifice to be offered in thanksgiving for the blessings received from God and for the forgiveness of sins.

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 sacrifice had to be repeated as long there was a need for forgiveness of sin.

When John the Baptist presents Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, he means that Jesus is the replacement of all the sacrifices offered in the temple for the forgiveness of sins. His own blood shed on the cross is given for the salvation of the world. No more sacrifice is needed. He is the one who brings peace between God and the world. His death on the cross is the only sacrifice that delivers men and women from their transgression of the Law and their sins.

Plus, by presenting Jesus as the Lamb of God, John the Baptist refers certainly to the event of the celebration of Passover. 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, the Hebrew 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 for generations.

As the Hebrews were delivered from death by the blood of the Lamb, John sees in Jesus a true Lamb whose blood purifies the world from sin and death. Jesus is the only one whose blood purifies us and obtains us life.

The sin of the world that Jesus takes away represents something bigger than our personal faults. It is the darkness of the human heart and the human situation in which we participate, sometimes without realizing it. The role of Jesus, therefore, is to set us free, to allow us to change our attitude, to receive God's love. 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.

Let us bring ourselves 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: 3, 5-6; 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3; John 1: 29-34



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