

2nd Sunday of the Year - A2011

“Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sin of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the Lamb.” These are the words that the priest will say as he holds up the Body and Blood of the Lord and invites the people to come and eat and drink. I say “will say” because this is the translation that we will have to use when the new Missal is published.

I mention it because those words “Behold the Lamb of God” come from the Gospel we have heard today and from the mouth of John the Baptist. He admits that it took him time to learn this and that it was in fact revealed to him by God.

The lamb, to which John refers, is the lamb slaughtered at Passover time which became a symbol of freedom from slavery and the powers of darkness. We know that Jesus is the new Lamb who gives his life to bring us freedom, forgiveness and healing through a share in the Spirit of God which Jesus freely shares with us. The Lamb of God is the image that John used and the image we use to help us understand that Jesus as God took upon himself and therefore, away from us, the destructive power of sin and evil.

John the Baptist is describing to us the importance of Jesus in that he is the one who is the source of all healing, all forgiveness and all restoration. In his life, death and resurrection, Jesus heaps upon himself the essential power of all evil and sin.

Notice how John the Baptist does not talk about ‘sins’ but sin – singular. What is it that he means? He is talking about that negative power which certainly exists and which is destructive of creation and human life. Because it is singular and finds its way into every life and situation it is impossible to overcome or eradicate by our own power. We can see its presence by its effects in our lives and in our world. Those tragic moments when we have no control and must accept the tribulation that comes our way; the broken relationships that refuse to mend; the struggles which blight our lives and will not go away; the tensions and divisions between groups and nations that cause untold suffering, which again seems outside our control. Then there is the way in which this power of ‘sin’ manifests itself in our personal conduct and behaviour. The selfishness and the many ways in which we do the things we know to be wrong and damaging and the difficulty we have in doing what we know to be good and wholesome. All this is the negative power that Jesus takes upon himself and defeats and ultimately controls. We can rejoice because Jesus is the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; or, in other words, with the infinite power of the Spirit, Jesus heals humanity and creation at the deepest fundamental level so the sin and evil do not have the last word. Jesus is the one who is in ultimate control because he is infinite goodness and sin and evil are not infinite.

As well as identifying Jesus as the Lamb of God, John the Baptist was blessed by being able to see the gift of the Holy Spirit descending and resting on Jesus. It is this Holy Spirit who is at the heart of Jesus’ healing work bringing unity and reconciliation to the brokenness and fracture that sin and evil produces. The same Holy Spirit is given to us for the same purpose. Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Communion fill us with the Spirit of God to equip us for our task. A task that is summed up beautifully by John at the end of today’s reading “Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.”

Yes, we are the witnesses to the truth about Jesus and our task is to proclaim that we have seen him and know him and, through the power of his Spirit working within us, we can show forth and make present his power for good.

Our lives as Christians have to be about the kind of love that witnesses to the power and presence of Christ. As we see in Jesus' own work, his power and presence were manifested whenever there was division, brokenness or anything else that fractured and destroyed life. So, we are to be experts in bringing about the peace and harmony that is Christ's gift to everyone. To be experts in this means that we are to be experts in recognising the darkness and brokenness, the isolation and unhappiness which attracted the healing action of Jesus in his own ministry.

Whenever we feel that tension within ourselves that grows out of division in relationships, the response is to pour in love no matter how costly that will be to us. Because this is to make present the healing action of Christ.

Whenever we are wronged, the natural response is to feel anger and resentment and those feelings must move us to forgive without counting the cost. And when we do wrong ourselves, when we are disturbed and torn apart within by all kinds of irrational thoughts, we must be ready to forgive ourselves and hand over our trials to Christ who brings peace.

Whenever we sense a movement within us that would desire exploitation and manipulation of another for selfish ends then we must respond with limitless respect for that person or situation because the other is made in the image and likeness of God and is, though we may not realise it, someone who can bring us many gifts for our own growth and well being.

Whenever we are overtaken by greed and our energies seem to be sapped by insatiable desires for possessions or pleasure, let us just relax our grip and refocus our energies and response to receiving the grace and peace which is God's endless gift to us.