Second Sunday of Ordinary Time: Lamb of God

The Christmas Season is over, but today's Gospel begins ordinary time with the Gospel readings left off at Advent. Once more we come upon John the Baptist, only this time from the *Gospel of John*. In the passage immediately before today's Gospel, the priests and Levites from Jerusalem ask the Baptist who he is. He answered that he was not the Messiah, Elijah or one of the other prophets. They asked him, then what he had to say for himself. John responded, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness 'make straight the way of the Lord.'" Then he said, "there is one coming after me whose sandal strap I am not fit to undo."

Then, on the next day, John sees Jesus. He gives Jesus a name that no one would expect. He does not call him the Messiah, even though Jesus is the Messiah, he does not call him the King of Kings, even though Jesus is the King of Kings, he calls him "the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." To John the Baptist, the title *Lamb of God*, best describes Jesus' action in the world. We remember John the Baptist's declaration and join him at every Mass when the celebrant holds up the consecrated host, the Body of the Christ, and proclaims, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

What was so significant in the title, "Lamb of God," that John uses when he points to Jesus? Certainly, the lamb is among the meekest of animals. John could have called Jesus the Lion of Judah, but no, he calls Him the lamb of God. Why? John looks back at the Prophet Isaiah's Fourth Song of the Suffering Servant, *Isaiah 53*, "He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth." John also looks forward to the lamb in the *Book of Revelation* chapter 5 who is slain yet risen. God's scroll containing His plan for mankind is held out, but it is sealed. "Who is worthy to unseal the scroll," a voice cries out. There are a great many tears because no one is found worthy to initiate God's plan. And them the Lamb that was slain appears. He opens the scroll."

So the title of Lamb of God that John uses when he points towards Jesus, directs us to the sacrifice of the Lord that results in the opening of God's plan for mankind. The very name, *Jesus*, means *Yahweh Saves*. The Word became flesh to save us. To save us from what? To save us from eternal death, which is the same as saying "to restore God's life within us." Mankind had forfeited the life of God when mankind decided that he did not need God. Adam, mankind, believed the serpent's temptation that if he stood up to God, he could be like God. Whether it was in the garden for the first parents or among people ever since, the original sin is the sin of rejecting God and thereby rejecting the Life of God.

Jesus came to restore the Life of God among those creatures made in God's image and likeness. Since creation had been entrusted to mankind, a man would be the one who would restore creation. The Second Person of the Holy Trinity took on a human nature, our celebration of Christmas. The "Word became flesh" to save us

from sin. Jesus, the Savior, the new Adam, would be the exact opposite of the old Adam. He would be obedient, even if this led to his being tortured and murdered. In the *Gospel of John*, the only gospel where Jesus is called the Lamb of God, the time of the crucifixion is set for the time that the lambs would be sacrificed for the Passover celebration. Jesus is the eternal sacrifice. He had complete trust in His Father, that the Father's plan would come to fruition.

Jesus said that to know Him is to know the Father. How much God must love us? We look at Jesus on the cross and have a hint of the love that God has for us.

There is a story about an old priest who gave the same sermon every Christmas. People would flock every year to hear this sermon. His sermon consisted of just one sentence, but the priest would say that sentence over and over, changing his tone, emphasizing one word, then another. What the elderly priest said was, "The wood of the manger is the wood of the cross." Jesus was born to die for us. Again, mankind had been entrusted with creation. A man would restore creation to God's plan. His death resulted in our receiving eternal life.

"Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world." We pray these words immediately before we receive the Eucharist. When Jesus gave us His Body and Blood at the Last Supper, He said that this is His Body which would be given up for us and this is His Blood which would be shed for us. When we receive communion we receive the gift of the Lamb of God, sacrificing Himself for us. We receive the Gift of the Lord's winning eternal life for us.

Today's Gospel leads us to a profound understanding of what we are doing and Whom we are receiving when we go to communion. We are taking Jesus within us saving us. He is Lord. He is King. He is the Messiah. Yes, and He is the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world.

Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Jesus, our Savior.