

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time A/2014

All the readings of this Sunday talk about the servant of God and his being sent to bring salvation to the world. They invite us to recognize Jesus as that servant who saves the world and to follow his guidance for our salvation.

The first reading of the prophet Isaiah talks about the vocation of the servant of God. It shows that through the work of that servant, God's glory and light will be shown to the whole world. It shows also that God has prepared his servant for this task so that he might be the agent of the unification and the restoration of his 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, the servant of God. 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 says also that, by way of a comparison between them, John the Baptist recognized Jesus' anteriority and superiority over him. After that, the Gospel reports the confession of John by revealing the reason why he was baptizing with water, namely that Jesus might be known to Israel.

Finally, the Gospel reports the way John the Baptist came to know Jesus at the time he was baptizing at the Jordan as it was revealed to him that the person on whom the Spirit will descend is the Son of God and the one who will baptize in the Holy Spirit.

What do we learn from this Gospel? Today I want to talk about Jesus as the power of God's forgiveness to the world. In fact, John the Baptist calls Jesus "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world".

Everybody knows well what a lamb is. It is a very simple and a gentle animal that has nothing to compare with the strength and the might of carnivores like lions, leopards, etc. In front of such animals, a lamb is just defenseless, powerless and ineffective.

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 for the liberation of the Hebrews from Egypt and the Jewish liturgy of sacrifice offered in the temple.

First of all, 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. In the temple, the liturgy was organized around the sacrifice to be offered in thanksgiving for the blessings received from God 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. This 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, his vision is that he 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.

Moreover, 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, all 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 do 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. In that sense, 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, then, 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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