

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - A

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

Excerpts from Pope Francis – Homily & Angelus - 19 January 2014

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Brothers and sisters, we have entered in the liturgical season called “ordinary” time. On this Sunday, the Gospel presents us with the scene of the encounter between Jesus and John the Baptist at the River Jordan. The one who recounts it is the eyewitness, John the Evangelist, who before becoming a disciple of Jesus, was a disciple of the Baptist, together with his brother James, with Simon and Andrew, all from Galilee, all fishermen. John the Baptist sees Jesus who is approaching amid the crowd and, inspired from on High, he recognizes in him the One sent by God; he therefore points him out with these words: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (Jn 1:29).

The verb that is translated as “take away” literally means “to lift up”, “to take upon oneself”. Jesus came into the world with a precise mission: to liberate it from the slavery of sin by taking on himself the sins of humankind. How? By loving. There is no other way to conquer evil and sin than by the love that leads to giving up one’s life for others. In the testimony of John the Baptist, Jesus assumes the features of the Lord’s Suffering Servant, who “has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows” (Isaiah 53:4) unto death on the Cross. He is the true Paschal Lamb, who immerses himself in the river of our sin in order to purify us.

John the Baptist sees before him a man who stands in line with sinners to be baptized, though he had no need of it. A man whom God sent into the world as a Lamb to be sacrificed. In the New Testament, the word “lamb” recurs many times and always in reference to Jesus. This image of the lamb might be surprising; indeed, an animal that is certainly not characterized by strength and power takes upon its shoulders such an oppressive weight. The huge mass of evil is removed and taken away by a weak and fragile creature, a symbol of obedience, docility and defenseless love that ultimately offers itself in sacrifice. The lamb is not a ruler but docile, it is not aggressive but peaceful; it shows no claws or teeth in the face of any attack; rather, it bears it and is submissive. And so is Jesus! So is Jesus, like a lamb.

What does it mean for the Church, for us today, to be disciples of Jesus, the Lamb of God? It means replacing malice with innocence, replacing power with love, replacing pride with humility, replacing status with service. It is huge work! We Christians must do this: replace malice with innocence, replace power with love, replace pride with humility, replace status with service. Being disciples of the Lamb means not living like a “besieged fortress”, but like a city placed on a hill, open, welcoming and supportive. It means not assuming closed attitudes but rather proposing the Gospel to everyone, bearing witness by our lives that following Jesus makes us freer and more joyous.

Jesus is called the Lamb: He is the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Jesus never ceased being a lamb: meek, good, full of love, close to the little ones, close to the poor. He was there, among the people, healing everyone, teaching, praying. Jesus, so weak, like a lamb. However, he had the strength to take all our sins upon himself, all of them. “But, Father, you don’t know my life: I have a sin that..., I can’t even carry it with a truck...”. Many times, when we examine our conscience, we find some there that are truly bad! But he carries them. He came for this: to forgive, to make peace in the world, but first in the heart. Perhaps each one of us feels troubled in his heart, perhaps he experiences darkness in his heart, perhaps he feels a little sad over a fault.... Jesus has come to take away all of this, He gives us peace, he forgives everything. “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away sins”: he takes away sin, it’s root and all! This is salvation Jesus brings about by his love and his meekness.

Many times we trust a doctor: it is good, because the doctor is there to cure us; we trust in a person: brothers and sisters can help us. It is good to have this human trust among ourselves. But we forget about trust in the Lord: this is the key to success in life. Trust in the Lord, let us trust in the Lord! “Lord, look at my life: I’m in the dark, I have this struggle, I have this sin...”; “Look at this: I trust in you!”. And this is a risk we must take: to trust in Him, and He never disappoints.

May the Lord Jesus, who is meek, who is good — he is a lamb — who came to take away all sins, accompany us on the path of our life.