

Second Sunday of the Year – A **January 19 and 20, 2008**

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6;
Psalm 40;
1 Corinthians 1:1-3;
John 1:29-34.

Today's Gospel reading comes from the beginning of John's Gospel, from the portion known as the "Book of Signs." This portion of the Gospel is so named because in the first twelve chapters Jesus reveals himself, in sign and in word, to be the long-awaited Messiah.

In this particular passage we again witness John the Baptist who attracted large crowds of followers by his powerful preaching. He was so popular that many of his disciples thought him to be Elijah; others went so far as to declare him the Messiah. Here, however, we witness him giving testimony about Jesus. It is powerful! He declares: "*Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*" (John 1:29) John fully realized that he himself was not the Messiah and so speaks of Jesus not only as "the Lamb of God" but also as the One who was from the beginning, the One on whom the Spirit rests, the Messiah.

Jean Vanier, a layman who left the world of academia to found group homes for those living with severe mental and physical challenges once wrote: "*To serve broken people means helping them as a mother helps her child...it means going down the ladder, and washing their feet as Jesus did.*"

John the Baptist was never as powerful as he was at that moment when he "came down his ladder" and recognized salvation hidden in his midst. In Jewish tradition the Messiah is found in a person one does not recognize at first.

As we saw in last weeks gospel Jesus also made a humble gesture. He, to whom John the Baptist had pointed the way, knelt down before John for baptism. It was a shocking gesture because he who was sinless was asking John the Baptist for a baptism for the forgiveness of sin.

There are biblical scholars who find the fact that John's baptism of Jesus is recorded by all four evangelists to be absolutely extraordinary. Extraordinary because when the Gospels were written the early Church was struggling to hold onto the conviction that Jesus was the sinless one of God. This was and is perhaps still confusing. But the story of John's baptism of Jesus was in the Gospels despite the fact that it was and is open to misinterpretation.

Why? Because when John says of Jesus, "Here is the Lamb of God" he is not only saying something about who Jesus is but also something about what Jesus as Messiah was to be about, his mission. The story of his baptism is critical to our understanding of his mission. His mission will find its fulfillment in his death and resurrection, the paschal mystery that has won for us salvation, which is the very core of our faith. Jesus is the Savior who emptied himself for our sake. The story of his baptism reminds us about just what kind of Savior we have. He is a Savior who "came down the ladder" so that he could enter our world, here, where our lives are both blest and broken.

We believe that Jesus is the Lamb of God, who has conquered sin and death and opened for us the way to eternal life. He is the universal Savior of whom Isaiah speaks in the first reading today: *"It is too little for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the survivors of Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."* This is what John means when he calls Jesus the Lamb of God.

We who come together here today stand in special relationship to Jesus, the Lamb of God. Through our baptism we are called into this relationship with God's chosen one, we received as he did the Spirit of God and therefore are also meant to be witnesses to Christ in our world.

May this Eucharist where we meet God, hidden in the humble forms of Word, Bread, and Wine strengthen us to come down our ladders, too. Come down our ladders that we might bring hope and healing, love and service to our blest and broken world and discover the joy and mystery of it all hidden in our midst.

