

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time: Jesus is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.

Isaiah 49:3,5-6; Psalm 40:2,4,7-8,8-9, 10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; John 1:29-34

Dear family and friends of the Co-Cathedral of St. Theresa Parish,

Greetings of peace to all on this Second Sunday in the Ordinary Time!

The declaration of John the Baptist about Jesus is worth reflecting on to grow in our amazement of the Holy Eucharist. He said, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn. 1:29). We hear this declaration many times, and one may think of the lamb as meek and innocent, and indeed it is. But this profound declaration of John the Baptist about Jesus poignantly speaks about the obedient and loving sacrifice.

The name Jesus means to deliver, to rescue, or God saves. Jesus' identity as the Lamb of God is associated with the great Jewish feast of the Passover. The feast recalls the story of the Israelites in Egypt under the oppressive role of the Pharaoh. God admonished the Pharaoh, through Moses, to let his people leave Egypt. Each time the Pharaoh refused this command, God sent a plague, and the final and most terrible plague involved the death of every firstborn child in Egypt. The Israelites were instructed to smear the doorposts of their dwellings so that the angel would pass over and keep them unharmed from the plague, and their children will be spared. The blood of the lamb saved them. Eventually, the Pharaoh was forced to allow Israel to leave Egypt, which was only temporary because he commanded his soldiers to pursue the Israelites. On the night before the Israelites left, under the leadership of Moses, they had a final meal, which included eating a roast lamb.

The lamb then becomes the sign and symbol of the liberation of God's people from slavery and oppression. This great event of the Exodus, the Great Going out, is commemorated in the Passover meal, which Jesus celebrated with his disciples at the Last Supper. It is no coincidence that Jesus' sacrificial death took place at the Passover. Jesus is the Lamb who sacrifices himself and is sacrificed for the atonement of our sins. This is the fulfillment of the words of Prophet Isaiah in our first reading about the "suffering servant" who is on a mission to bring the light of the world and show the glory of God (cf. Is 49). Jesus, "the suffering servant," is the new Lamb of God who brings freedom and liberation from the slavery of evil and sin. He is the voice behind or embodies the words of the Responsorial Psalm, "Here am I, Lord, I come to do your will" (Ps 40), whose obedient offering culminated on his passion, death, and resurrection.

During the elevation of the Holy Eucharist before the Holy Communion, we heard again the words spoken by John the Baptist, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to his supper." What a joy and privilege to receive into ourselves the Lamb of God, the Savior of the world. The Savior makes himself accessible to the one he saved. It is an incredible offer to behold the Lamb of God before our eyes! He is the Lamb whose sacrifice unites heaven and earth and opens the way to reconciliation, peace, and eternal life.

The people of the Old Testament can only dream and look forward to beholding and receiving him. How privileged we are; he is before us. The Israelites housed the Lord inside the ark of the covenant made of gold, and not everyone could touch it, but now we have the privilege to touch the Lord and house him in our bodies. For several years, King Solomon built a magnificent house for the Lord and reserved the holiest place decorated with gold and precious stones where only the priest could enter, but now our Lord, the holy of holies, makes each of us his dwelling places. King David rejoiced and danced before the Lord enthroned at the altar splendidly adorned with expensive gemstones, but now our Lord allowed himself to be placed on our mouth, which could be indisposed in receiving him. We ran to places of miracles and loved to wear charm bracelets, but we have the creator of miracles and the charm of all charms in our hands. We spend money to visit pilgrim places and are moved to touch the relics of the saints, but our Lord, the saint of all saints, comes to us wholly and entirely in his divinity and humanity during the Holy Communion, when accepted in faith animates and transforms all the faculties of our bodies with his surprising holiness.

Behold the Lamb of God! We receive him with trepidation knowing that we fall short of living a virtuous life, and we humbly say, "Lord, I am not worthy that you enter under my roof. But only say the word, my soul will be healed." The one we receive or, better still, the one we are in communion with has the power to heal our infirmities, deliver us from sin, and configure us into his likeness. We become what we receive.

The greetings of St. Paul's letter to the Corinthians in our second reading remind us of this, he said, "To you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy" (1 Cor 1:2). The Lamb of God sanctifies us, makes us holy. Such a sublime gift is not forced on us, and it is to be accepted by faith. Our holiness is not in a name but in our soul; we are gifted with nothing less than the life of the risen Lord, but it asks for our freedom to say, "here I am, Lord, I come to do your will."

I remember watching the news on TV. It was about an interview with a woman who lost her brother during the typhoon that devastated the northern part of the Philippines. She was crying out of pain and suffering when she was interviewed. And while she was narrating how her brother died, you could also sense the joy and liveliness that came with her pain. She said that her brother successfully brought his family from danger to safety. But he was not yet satisfied. He told the family: "We are all safe. There are still others who are not safe yet. I will try to help. Wait for me." So he left to go out and rescue other people. And in the process, the water got higher, the current became stronger, and he lost the strength. He drowned. When they found his body, it caused so much pain to the family. While the sister was crying, she said: "He could have saved his life. But for the sake of others, he sacrificed his."

Little did she know that Jesus, the Lamb of God, who sacrificed himself so that we could have life, was what her brother chose to follow.

We behold and receive Jesus, the Lamb of God, through the Holy Eucharist; we are his witnesses!

God bless you.

Fr. Manny Hewe
Pastor