

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

When I am watching the tennis, I am usually looking at people that I know very little about. I don't know about you, but I like to know at least a little bit about them: where they come from, how successful they have been, and as the tournament proceeds, who they have won against to get this far. The television commentators often help us to get to know the players that we are watching.

In our gospel today we quickly move on from the birth of Jesus to the beginning of his public ministry. Jesus was still very much an unknown ordinary young man when he walked towards John the Baptist on the edge of the desert. But John shares something of God's knowledge of who Jesus is and what he will become. John tells us that it is Jesus coming towards him. He calls him the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. We hear those words each time we celebrate the Eucharist. We ask Jesus the Lamb of God to have mercy on us and to give us peace at the breaking of the Bread. We are then invited to the table of the Lamb by those words, "Behold the Lamb of God. Behold Him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb." But familiarity can dull our ears to the image used here.

The people of Israel would kill a lamb each Passover to remember and celebrate the night that God freed them

from slavery in Egypt. On that night the blood of a lamb was smeared on the doorposts of their houses so that the angel of death would pass them by. John is already getting us ready for when Jesus would be handed over to his enemies on Passover night and be put to death. His sacrifice would free us all from the slavery of sin and death.

John may have also had in mind the image of the Servant of God taken from the Book of Isaiah. This servant is led like a lamb to the slaughter house not uttering a word. This servant is also the one who takes upon himself the sins of humankind.

But the image of the lamb that is found in the Book of Revelation is a glorious image of one that was once slain but is now alive surrounded by the angels and saints in heaven. This is the lamb to whom glory and honour are given.

John describes this lamb as taking away the sin of the world. He uses the singular for sin. He knows that sin has many shapes and forms, but he sees the foundation of people's sin in their lack of relationship with Jesus. Unbelief is the sin of the world in John's eyes. Jesus had come to take away that unbelief. He had come to draw people into relationship with him and so with his Father. It is only when we come to believe in Jesus that we can

know the depth of God's love for us and begin to respond to that love. Jesus had come to take away everything that prevents us from being lovers. He had come to make it possible for us to trust in God's goodness to us no matter what we might endure. He had come to give the hope that allows us to see beyond the pain of today to the joy of an ultimate tomorrow.

So much of our world is still caught up in the sin of unbelief. Many parents choose not to hand on a faith in Jesus that they have received. Those who do not know God cannot interpret the good things that happen to them as expressions of God's love for them. They cannot trust in God's care for them because they cannot see where God is. In what or in whom do these people put their hope?

John describes Jesus as the one who ranks before him, because he existed before him. John was six months older than Jesus, but Jesus existed before time. John affirms that Jesus is God. And John only knew who Jesus was because God had revealed that to him. The coming of the Spirit upon Jesus was a sign that made it clear to John that here was the one who was going to baptise with the Spirit. Jesus was the one who would share his own Spirit of love with us. Jesus was the one who would unite us with the God of love. "I have seen and I am the witness that he is the chosen one of God."

What John says here is quite a challenge to us. We who have come to know Jesus cannot keep that revelation of who Jesus is to ourselves. We too have to be witnesses to the truth of who Jesus is. We have to make Jesus known by the way that we live our lives each day. John speaks about Jesus as a servant and a light for the nations. Jesus longs to be that servant today through you and me. We, the church, continue to be the light of the nations. We continue to help people come to belief in Jesus by the kind of people that we are, by the way that we live our lives in union with Jesus. When people see us, they see something of Jesus. When we reach out to others in need, they see something of Jesus coming towards them as John saw Jesus coming towards him. May we have the grace and the courage to let Jesus live and love through us.