

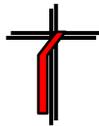
Reflecting on the Sunday's Readings

Behold the Lamb of God

*Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6 // Paul 1st Corinthians 1: 1-3 // John 1: 29-34
January 19, 2020*

Rev. Mr. Peter B. Swan

With added text for the Returning Confirmation Retreat Teens.



You come to Church today and you notice right away that the Christmas trees have been taken down and the manger has been put away. Yes, another Christmas season has passed. As we begin these next six Sundays in ordinary time we move into the very beginning of Jesus' public life, usually referred to as his ministry. Our Gospel from John opens just after Jesus had finished His forty day fast in the desert. **He had come once again to the banks** of the Jordan to check on John the Baptist whom He would always admire. He had a premonition He would never see him again and we know He was correct. When John the Baptist saw Jesus approaching him, he pointed to Jesus and said, **"Behold, the Lamb of God"**.

John the Baptist is a great example of what it means to be ordinary. Fact is, there is much greatness in being ordinary. Even though John felt he was not worthy to untie Jesus' sandals, Jesus did say of him, ***"Among those born of women there has been none greater than John the Baptist."***

"Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world." Those words were attributed to John the Baptist. As he stood on one of the banks of the Jordan River that day, he was surrounded by many people: people from Jerusalem, people from the countryside of Judea. They came to him in huge numbers. Of course, that was not unusual. In fact, Scripture indicates it was always that way for John the Baptist in his ministry. He was a charismatic, passionate preacher who could draw a crowd and then hold them spellbound, because he spoke the unadulterated truth with clarity and conviction. Even some of those who hated him, like

King Herod, were “captivated by his words.” On this particular occasion, as he was ministering to the hundreds who had gathered for spiritual nourishment, John suddenly caught sight of a familiar face in the crowd. But John was not alone. Everyone who was there that day observed this young man as he humbly approached the Baptist. But to them, he was simply a young, Galilean male, about 30 years of age; if they knew his family they would have said, “Oh yes, that’s the son of Joseph, the carpenter from Nazareth.” In other words, when these hundreds of people looked at Jesus, they saw someone who appeared to be just like everybody else. But not John! John looked up, saw his cousin walking in his direction, raised his finger and said, **“Behold! The Lamb of God!”**

Why did John make such an acclamation? In the Old Testament lambs were frequently used in sacrifice. Calling Christ a Lamb, John was stating the fact that He is the One who is to be sacrificed, the One who would reconcile God with man. It is no mistake then that the death of Jesus occurred at Passover time. Nor was it any surprise that at the moment of his death the veil of the Temple was torn in two as a sign that from then on men should turn to Christ and see him as their one true Savior. Today, we come together in this Holy Sanctuary, at this Holy Liturgy to remember and show our gratitude to the Lamb, **and each of us owes Him much.**

The Catholic Church operates on a three year cycle A, B, and C. This year we are in Cycle A and should be reading from the Gospel of Matthew. But instead today, we read from the gospel of John to prolong our reflection on the Epiphany’s theme, the inauguration

of Jesus' public ministry at his baptism, which we celebrated last week, and to proclaim him as, **'The Lamb of God!'**

"Behold the Lamb of God." For almost 2,000 years, we've been saying those same words every time we celebrate the Holy Eucharist. Where are we, physically, mentally and spiritually, when during Mass, the celebrant says, ***"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."*** We respond, ***"Lord, I am not worthy that thou should enter under my roof, but only say the word and I shall be healed."*** Where are we? Is our response, our true feeling and belief? Or has it become some unthinking response—something routine, said without concern or true meaning? Or is it something profound, something we do with deep feeling, intense thought—real meaning and real belief? Think of it—there before you in the simple form of a wafer, is the same Jesus Christ that stood before John the Baptist some 2,000 years ago. **Are we awe struck?** Do we really realize what is before us? Do we really realize how privileged we are? Do we truly see Jesus as we receive and hear the words, **"Body of Christ?"**

Here at Saint Philip Benizi, we are so privileged to have a choice of which Mass we will attend each weekend. If, some weekend, our parish church's schedule doesn't fit our schedule, we can usually drive to another nearby parish for Mass at a more convenient time. **Receiving the Body and Blood of Christ** is usually not a struggle. But, what if, the next nearest Church was 50 to a hundred miles away, and we held to the belief that we must attend a weekend Mass—Remember that commandant ***"thou shall keep holy the Sabbath"?***

What then would be our attitude? Or still worse, what if we lived in a land where attendance at Mass was forbidden, and we had to sneak around, attend Mass in secret—hidden from the “authorities”? Just like some of us had to do when we were in Saudi Arabia during the first Gulf War. Maybe being able to attend Mass and receive Holy Eucharist just once or twice a year...how then would we value the opportunity to receive the Body and Blood of Christ? Has our being privileged become a stumbling block to our knowing how blessed we are? Has our receiving of this Holy Eucharist become routine with little to no meaning? **Yes, what an awesome privilege we have!** Shouldn't we then, approach this privilege with awe, profound respect, humility and thankfulness? Shouldn't we be dressed, both physically and spiritually, in the knowledge of in whose presence we are? When you go to a concert or to a play, once the opening act begins, you are not permitted to enter until that act is over. Shouldn't we then with profound respect arrive for the celebration of the Eucharist in time and leave only when the last note of the last song is sung?

During this coming week, I hope that you will take some time to pause and realize the privilege we have in being this intimate with the God who created us and redeemed us. The God who has not left us orphans, that same God who took the form of the ones he created, suffered and died for us and in His generosity gave us the means to stay holy, by receiving Him.

And so, as we continue with our celebration and come forward to this table to receive the Lamb of God, let us pause and ask our heavenly Father for the humility to be **ordinary**, the ability to seek

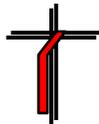
God endlessly, to find God promptly, and to possess God fully. And to have a renewed reverence for the Holy Eucharist. And as always, let us ask him to guide our thoughts, our feelings and our actions.

*****Added for the teen mass – Teens returning from Confirmation Retreat.**

Let us really spend some time allowing our lives to be infused with devotion, love and honor of the great gift of Jesus himself to each and every one of us, the gift of the Holy Eucharist. May we have the courage, like John the Baptist, to reveal Christ to the World. May we join the Baptist in pointing out Jesus to others and saying with our lives, **“Behold the Lamb of God!”** May we not forget that **“The Wood of the Manger is the Wood of the Cross!”**

The Lord is on watch. He is always near. The Lord is my shepherd, I walk with no fear.

May God Bless Each and Every One of You! And from my family to yours, “A Very Happy New Year!”



***** It is always so nice to have our teenagers join us for the liturgy. They have just returned from their confirmation retreat. My dear young ones, during the weekend I hope you were able to have some fun, hang out with your friends and most of all grow deeper and stronger in your faith. Most of you went on this retreat with anticipation, apprehension, curiosity and one of you even challenged God to give you an answer. And I know he answered you. During this weekend you heard how beautiful and important the Sacraments are to each of us. One talk you heard in particular was about Holy Orders. Holy Orders are just not for Priests and Deacons. **By our baptism we are all** anointed as “Priest, Prophet and King.” And as priest and prophet, it is your responsibility like John the Baptist to point Jesus out to others and to draw them closer to the Lord. This morning, the Coach blew his whistle and each of us stepped onto the playing field. How we play the game will define what kind of person we are. Remember that *“Wrong is wrong even if everybody is doing it; and Right is right even if nobody is doing it.”* When the time comes for you to choose, I hope you will choose Christ. Tomorrow, when you return to school, you should be a complete different person than when you left school last Friday because during this weekend you have changed, you have been infused with the Holy Spirit and have grown deeper and richer in your faith. Like John the Baptist, you should not be afraid or ashamed to point out Jesus to others and say, “Behold the Lamb of God!”**