

Homily-Second Sunday '08

The Gospel of John does not present the baptism of the Lord. Instead the Gospel of John presents the scene we hear proclaimed today in which John the Baptist gives testimony about who Jesus is. In the prologue to John's Gospel, from which our Gospel is taken, John the Evangelist gives special focus to various titles of Jesus. Today's Gospel focuses on Jesus as the Lamb of God, the bearer of the Holy Spirit and the Son of God.

Lamb of God

In the Gospel Jesus approaches John the Baptist and he calls out, "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." The image of the Lamb of God evokes the Old Testament rituals of sacrificing animals in order to atone for sins and to restore right relationship with God. The imagery of Jesus as the Lamb of God reminds us that Jesus died for our sins in order to bring about a right relationship with God. Through the Lamb of God we can hope for forgiveness of our sins and right relationship with God.

In the Gospel of John Jesus is symbolically presented as the paschal lamb that was killed to liberate his people from their sins. As the Israelites were preparing to escape from slavery in Egypt, God told the people to smear the blood from the Passover Lamb over the lintels and doorposts of their doors. Then God passed through the land of Egypt and slew all of the firstborn of the Egyptians man and beast alike. God passed over the homes which had the blood of the Passover Lambs smeared on their lintels and doorposts. In keeping with this story Jesus is symbolically shown to be the Passover Lamb in the Gospel of John. In the Passion Narrative of John, Jesus was tried on the Preparation Day for the Passover. He was condemned to die at the sixth hour which was the time that the Passover lambs were sacrificed in the temple. The Gospel of John is the only Gospel to state that none of Jesus' bones were broken as he hung upon the cross. The Gospel indicates that none of his bones were broken as God had ordered that none of the bones of the Passover Lamb were to be broken. Just as the Israelites were saved through the blood of the Passover Lamb, so followers of Christ are liberated from their sins through the shedding of the blood of Jesus.

It is significant that John the Baptist says that Jesus takes away the "sin" of the world. Jesus does not merely take away our individual sins instead Jesus wins victory over the power of sin and death in the world. Jesus is the Lamb of God and through his death and resurrection he has conquered sin and death and brought the hope of salvation to all people.

Vehicle of the Holy Spirit

John further testifies that at the baptism of Jesus he saw the Holy Spirit descend on Jesus. The presentation of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel of John is different than the presentation of the Spirit in the writings of Paul. In Paul's writings the focus of the Holy Spirit is on the gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to believers. From the Pauline perspective Christians receive gifts of faith, healing, prophecy and the ability to work miracles from the Holy Spirit. Believers also receive the ability to teach and lead from the Holy Spirit.

The Gospel of John focuses on the Holy Spirit as the consoler who will be with the disciples after Jesus dies. The disciples are shown as being men who are afraid. Jesus tells the disciples that he will send his Spirit who will both give them strength but who will also teach them all that Jesus has taught during his lifetime. In John's Gospel the Spirit is a Spirit of Wisdom who will guide the disciples in their need. As a result of the Spirit's place in the life of the disciples they will be able to speak the Word of Jesus.

Through the Spirit of Jesus we can hope for the gift of the Spirit and the possibility of "living in the Spirit." The Holy Spirit both gives us spiritual gifts which allow us to live the life of Christ in the world and the Spirit teaches us the words and wisdom of Jesus. The Spirit continues to give us strength and to console us in our times of need. The Spirit continues to be a source of consolation to believers in the absence of the Lord.

Son of God

John testified that Jesus is the Son of God. Through our baptism into Christ we become adopted sons and daughters of God. The title of Son of God shows that Jesus had a close relationship with God. We are called to see that we likewise have the dignity of being sons and daughters of God. One of the characteristics of the Gospel of John is that it speaks of the close relationship we are called to have with Jesus and with the Father. Through this relationship we have life which begins now and never ends. How well do we remain in this relationship and allow it to grow?

Do we reveal Christ?

The Gospel reading in today's Mass is a testimony by John as to who Jesus is. Within the testimony John admits, "I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel." I find it curious that John did not recognize his own cousin. John says that God revealed who Jesus was through the Holy Spirit who came to rest on him. In the Gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, Jesus indicated that he was revealed as the Messiah through the works that were manifest in his life. These included works of healing and liberating those who were bound. John does not initially recognize Jesus. As members of the Body of Christ we are called to reveal Christ to the world. When others encounter us do they experience Jesus through us? In the joy, love, forgiveness and prayer in our lives do they experience Christ? Last week

we celebrated the Epiphany. The Feast of the Epiphany teaches us that we are called to manifest Christ to the world. How well do we manifest Christ through our lives?

The Gospel that we hear proclaimed today asks us two central questions. First the Gospel reminds us that John recognized Jesus as he saw the Spirit come down and rest on Jesus. The meaning of the Gospel leads us to reflect on whether we live in the Spirit? Do we open ourselves to the presence of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit in our lives? Is the Spirit the Consoler of our lives? Does the Spirit both strengthen us and teach us as it strengthened and taught the apostles after the death of Jesus. Finally, John did not recognize Jesus. How well do others recognize us as the Body of Christ? Is Christ made present through the living out of our lives?