



Behold the Lamb of God *Racial Justice Day*

John 1:29–42

“I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’ I have seen and I testify that this is God’s Chosen One.”

January 15, 2017

Thought for the Week

Scriptures: Isaiah 49: 3, 5-6 • 1 Corinthians 1: 1-3 • John 1: 29-34

I imagine that many of us may occasionally discover that there are certain social habits or graces that we may never have learned as youngsters and even as adults we still find certain ordinary practices difficult or complex. Perhaps we may even rehearse them occasionally, but when the moment comes to use them we stumble around.

I personally admit that I have an embarrassing difficulty with one practice that I probably should have learned from my mother: How do you introduce two or more people to one another? Can you keep the names straight, pronounce them correctly and not get stuck in the middle? I tell you I have been embarrassed on many occasions trying to do it correctly. I will forget one or other of the names, interchange them until the two individuals simply notice my predicament and introduce themselves to each other. So, I’m off the hook, this time.

Of course, introducing someone is important; most of our friendships over the years have come about because some one introduced us to another person who ultimately may have become a very important person in our life.

We have an interesting introductory incident in today’s gospel taken from of the strange life of John the Baptist. First a bit of context: This event happens before the time Jesus became well known in the villages of Palestine. No one is yet aware of his public charisma; he is just another wandering stranger looking for companionship.

One day, the gospel passage tells us, Jesus, like many others, was approaching the Jordan River where John was preaching his message of repentance and conducting baptisms. He sees Jesus coming near turns to the bystanders and says: “Look, there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one who will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.” I am sure this introduction must have been a great mystery to the local peasantry but in biblical terms it was an introduction to the person and career of Jesus of Nazareth who, of course, would eventually become well known over all of Palestine as a prophet, even in metropolitan Jerusalem and the entire world.

Now, think about the implications of this introduction. Every one of us has at some point in our lives been introduced to Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Of course, we may have accidentally met Jesus on our own some way, but more than likely our mother or father or our Sunday school teacher told us about Jesus until Jesus simply became an integral part of our life.

I think that is the way it happens generally in Christian circles: a minister or some Christian friend shares his/her personal experience about the role of Jesus in their life. It’s all about person-to-person relationships, one person to another person in a spirit of trust.

As I read or listen to the news every day (and there is still some good news occasionally!) I discover examples of how the Christian life spreads and grows around the world. A friend of mine reads the main section of the *New York Times* every single morning. At least three times each week he tells me he finds articles on Christianity. Fortunately this has become

much more frequent since within the past decade.

One might say therefore that John the Baptist started something when he introduced Jesus to the crowds. Every Sunday in churches across our great country people of all ages hear of the great works of Jesus Christ. Not simply recounted stories from the Bible but contemporary accounts of Jesus being active in people's lives today. At World Youth Day celebration in Poland this past summer thousands crowded around the Pope to hear what he had to say. He didn't give a complicated theological discourse; he simply spoke of Jesus as peacemaker, the One who calls all people together and forgives in love as a shepherd calls his sheep to safety.

The point of all this is to say that those who are attracted to Jesus and his message are not necessarily attracted by a particular individual, or ministers from any particular denomination. It happens every day among trusted friends or family members. It's word of mouth that makes the difference and it can come about through you or me or anybody else who cares about Jesus' life and message.

Over the years I think I may have become slightly more adept at introducing people to one another. Perhaps lots of people on their way home from church are doing the same thing. Word about Jesus just seems to get around. It's up to us, you and me, to make it happen.



Behold the Lamb of God

John saw Jesus coming to him, and pointed him out as the Lamb of God. The paschal lamb, in the shedding and sprinkling of its blood, the roasting and eating of its flesh, and all the other circumstances of the ordinance, represented the salvation of sinners by faith in Christ. And the lambs sacrificed every morning and evening, can only refer to Christ slain as a sacrifice to redeem us to God by his blood. John came as a preacher of repentance, yet he told his followers that they were to look for the pardon of their sins to Jesus only, and to his death.

It agrees with God's glory to pardon all who depend on the atoning sacrifice of Christ. He takes away the sin of the world; purchases pardon for all that repent and believe the gospel. This encourages our faith; if Christ takes away the sin of the world, then why not my sin? He bore sin for us, and so bears it from us. God could have taken away sin, by taking away the sinner, as he took away the sin of the old world; but here is a way of doing away sin, yet sparing the sinner, by making his Son sin, that is, a sin-offering, for us.

See Jesus taking away sin, and let that cause hatred of sin, and resolutions against it. Let us not hold that fast, which the Lamb of God came to take away. To confirm his testimony concerning Christ, John declares the appearance at his baptism, in which God himself bore witness to him. He saw and bares record that he is the Son of God. This is the end and object of John's testimony, that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

John took every opportunity that was offered to lead people to Christ.