

Second Sunday Per Annum (B)

January 18, 2015.

Look, here is the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:35).

This declaration made by John the Baptist and which we hear before the reception of Holy Communion at every Mass, is a succinct summary of the mission of the Messiah. Last Sunday, we celebrated the Feast of our Lord's Baptism, the inauguration of His Mission as Suffering Servant and so marked the beginning of His public life, which ended with His Sacrificial Death upon the Cross; the fullest manifestation or theophany of the nature of God. When we speak of God's nature, what is meant is who God *really* is in Himself. In the Mystery of His Redemptive Incarnation God reveals Himself as the God of Salvation. So we who profess belief in this God, the True God, confess that to believe in Him is to be saved. *But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God (Jn. 1:12).* St. Irenaeus explains that *the Son performs everything as a ministry to the Father, from beginning to end, and without the Son no one can know God. The way to know the Father is the Son* (From a Treatise Against Heresies, *Liturgy of the Hours*, Vol. 3, p.63-64).

Having celebrated the Feast of Christmas and the Epiphany, we now begin anew our commemoration of the mysteries of our Lord's earthly life; preparing for the annual celebration of the Paschal Mystery of our Lord's Passion, Death and Resurrection. Every new year is a year of grace during which we endeavour to know and love God the Father more; to grow in our likeness to Christ our Saviour and become one with Him in His saving work. Salvation is very personal, intimate even; and so our response to this gift is also very personal. The Father calls each one of us each in our way responds with the words of Samuel: *Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.* In the silence of prayer God reveals Himself to us; and in the life of our Saviour Jesus Christ the Father is made known. Recall the words of our Lord to the Apostle Philip: *He who has seen me has seen the Father (Jn. 14:9).*

Look, here is the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:35). During the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy it is Christ our Saviour that we endeavour to hear and to see; to encounter, to love and to serve. And from this encounter we go forth as others have done before us and please God, will do so after us, to continue Christ's saving work. There is overwhelming historical and contemporary evidence that when the individual person resolves to follow Christ along the path of devout discipleship, there is nothing better for extending human freedom, maturity and self-knowledge. These virtues form the basis of any just and virtuous society; be it the individual family or the greater community or culture to which we belong. Although we sometimes hear it said that we ought not to engage in culture wars or conflicts, the truth of the matter is that such a conflict is inevitable, sadly. St. John writes, *And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil (Jn. 3:19).* Generally speaking, it could be said that the greater culture, at least as it is popularly represented in the entertainment media, has lost a religious understanding of the human condition – that man is a fallen creature for whom virtue is necessary. The secular substitute – the belief in the perfection of human life on earth by the endless extension of a choice of pleasures – is both unattainable and less realistic in its understanding of human nature (Cf. Theodore Dalrymple, *Our Culture, What's Left of It*, p. 53). If human nature, created in God's image and likeness, and destined to share in

the Divine Nature is to be perfected and fulfilled; then it can only do so if conformed to the One who has redeemed it and by the gift of the Holy Spirit is at work purifying it, sanctifying it and transforming it into the likeness of the One who has called us *out of darkness into his marvellous light* (1 *Pet.* 2:9).

The proclamation of Christ, *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, that we make each and every day at the celebration of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass actively engages us in the work of salvation. It does so firstly, in the personal assent that we give to the truth of these words and their implication, and then, in the manner that we endeavour to see and do all things in light of this truth. The world needs to be redeemed. Atonement and reparation are needed. Consequently, as Catholics we engage the world that Christ our Lord has redeemed and those who live in this world with the same desire for salvation, for freedom, maturity, self-knowledge; for illumination and for the peace that God alone can give.

The proclamation of Jesus Christ as *the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* which John the Baptist made at the very beginning of our Lord's public life culminated with the realization of these words in His Sacrificial Death on the Altar of the Cross. They are realized no less in the Eucharistic Sacrifice that He has left us as a memorial of His Saving Work. As we prepare to receive the Sacrament of the Eucharist, once again you will hear, *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* (Communion Rite, *The Roman Missal*). If we truly believe the truth of these words and act on them, in time, our lives will become a unified whole and we will engage the world and everything and everyone in it with *Eucharistic tenderness*. The tenderness of the Saviour who becomes for us the Lamb of Sacrifice and the Bread of Life necessarily becomes the pattern with which we engage the world and those in it who know not Christ. As the Church prepared for the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, Pope St. John Paul II reminded us that *it is part of the grandeur of Christ's love not to leave us in the condition of passive recipients, but to draw us into His saving work* (John Paul II, *Incarnationis Mysterium*, Nov. 29, 1998). When we unite ourselves sacramentally to the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, we become one with Him in the work of salvation. Like Him we endeavour to alleviate the burden of sin that weighs heavily on humanity. This has always been the work of Catholics who rightly understand that human nature though fallen and wounded, can be restored and healed and sanctified by grace. Our devout discipleship is the greatest force in the world because everything we do as our Lord's disciples is aided by His powerful grace. May our commemoration of the mysteries of our Lord's life and the devout reception of His most Holy Body and Blood enable us to participate more fully in the work of salvation.