

Homily for the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time - Cycle A

**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception
Springfield, Illinois**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

All the readings in our liturgy today tell us that Our Lord's message is for the whole world. It is universal. Jesus fulfills the prophecy of Isaiah in the first reading, which says that God's servant will bring a message of salvation that must reach to the ends of the earth. Saint Paul insists in his letter to the Corinthians that the Church that gathers there is not just a local church but is linked to a great worldwide network of churches, made up of those "who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours." Then Jesus is heralded in the Gospel by John the Baptist not just as someone who forgives the sins of his own disciples, but as the Lamb of God who "takes away *the sin of the world.*"

Today's Gospel focuses on the important role John the Baptist played in giving testimony to Jesus. John has just undergone intense questioning by the Pharisees, who are trying to discover who John really is and why he is

doing what he does. Today's Gospel takes place on the next day as John sees Jesus coming toward him. Immediately, John refers to Jesus as "the Lamb of God."

This is a very significant title that John gives Jesus - the Lamb of God. What does it mean? Its meaning is derived from several sources in the Bible. Its primary reference is to the Passover lamb that symbolizes Israel's deliverance from slavery in Egypt, as described in the *Book of Exodus* (*Exodus* 12:1-3). Jesus is the Passover Lamb who delivers us from slavery to sinfulness by his death and resurrection. There is also the suffering servant described by the Prophet Isaiah, who is like a lamb led to the slaughter (*Isaiah* 53:7). By His willing sacrifice on the cross, Jesus is the lamb led to the slaughter. "Lamb of God" also refers to the mighty lamb that appears in the *Book of Revelation* (*Revelation* 17:14) and which, in battle, has great power to overcome the evil beasts ranged against it. By His resurrection, Jesus is victorious over sin and death. For the Gospel of John, all of these Old Testament images combine to provide a rich background for alluding to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

John the Baptist also refers to Jesus as "the one who existed before me," which points to Jesus' preexistence. John the Baptist testifies that he saw the

Spirit come like a dove and remain upon Jesus. John had been told that whomever the Spirit comes down upon and remains over is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit. This one is the Son of God. When we put John the Baptist's testimonies together, we come up with the following description: Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. He is the preexistent one, the bearer of the Holy Spirit, the Son of God. Saint John the Evangelist paints with broad strokes and rich images.

It is no accident that the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of the Second Vatican Council bears the Latin title *Lumen Gentium*, "Light of the Nations." One of the hallmarks of Vatican II is the "universal call to holiness," the notion that all Christians, regardless of individual vocation or life circumstances, are called to union with God and thereby have a role to play in the salvation of all. Jesus is the light, and as His Body, the Church, we must manifest the light of Christ to all peoples within the circumstances of our lives.

The Church is all about relationships. As the three persons of the Trinity are an intimate communion of Father, Son and Spirit in relationship to each other, the Church exists as a communion in relationship to God and in relation to each other, the People of God, the Body of Christ. As a bishop,

I have a special relationship with you, and you have a special relationship with me, and one of my roles is to bridge the relationship between you and the Pope and the rest of the universal Church, so that we may all be one in Christ's Body.

But this "special relationship" is not just about recognizing each other's faces and knowing one another's names and titles. In the Church, we call this relationship a *communio*, that is, the communion of those belonging to the Body of Christ, the Church, which the Second Vatican Council in *Lumen Gentium* (14), describes as follows: "Fully incorporated into the Church are those who, possessing the Spirit of Christ, accept all the means of salvation given to the Church together with her entire organization, and who - by the bonds constituted by the profession of faith, the sacraments, ecclesial government, and communities - are joined in the visible structure of the Church of Christ, who rules her through the Supreme Pontiff and the bishops." Thus, to remain in this authentic *communio*, we can never see ourselves as somehow "independent" or act apart from the universal Church or even the local Church, or else we cease to be truly Catholic.

As Christians we believe that Christ offers a universal message of salvation. He offers a unique revelation of the truth. Jesus is the Lamb of

God, forever uniquely relating God and man. We human beings look at Jesus and see the kind and loving face of God. God the Father, the Almighty Creator of the universe, looks at Jesus His Son and sees a human face. Jesus unites the whole universe – creation with the Creator, taking away the sins of the world. Now we can by our actions of love echo the love of Jesus. We can reach out to others, becoming a light for those around us.

The early Christians preached the Gospel to the Gentile world and were willing to use the riches of that Gentile culture to express Christ's message, as Paul did. Living in a multi-religious society gives us the opportunity of sharing with others the unique and Catholic Gospel that Christ brought. May gathering around this altar and our celebration of the Eucharist always fill us with an awareness of the grace and peace that comes to us from God our Father through the Lord Jesus Christ. As we approach Christ in communion at every Mass, we are reminded how He saves us through humble self-giving, for He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

May God give us this grace. Amen.