

From the Pastor

Having concluded the Christmas season last Sunday, we find ourselves in a particularly brief period of Ordinary Time before the start of Lent. We will celebrate three Sundays of Ordinary Time before Lent begins with Ash Wednesday on February 6. I believe this is the earliest Lent could possibly be, nonetheless, it will quickly be upon us.

I am planning a four-week Lenten series to reflect on the Sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist, Reconciliation, and Confirmation. We will begin on Tuesday, February 12 at 7:30pm in the Church, continuing on February 19, 26, and March 4. On March 11, we will celebrate our Lenten Communal Penance. Please mark your calendars now and plan to join us for this important time of reflection and prayer. We will also offer a reflection series on Jesus on Wednesday afternoons. Please see this bulletin for more details, I encourage your participation.

As we move from one liturgical season to another, there is no abrupt shift or breach in the rhythm of the scriptures. We concluded the Christmas season with the baptism of Jesus, and this week we continue with the revelation of his mission and identity. Today's reading from the gospel of John does not include the specific baptism of Jesus, but uses John in the revelation of who Jesus is.

An underlying movement or theme here is that of faith. Do you want to know Jesus? Do you want to share relationship with God through the person of Christ, and all that God offers through him? Presuming this stance of faith, and our desire to share in the identity and mission of Jesus, John has much to give us.

Not unlike us, John struggled to know and recognize Jesus. He too didn't know exactly what to expect. He knows he has been called by God. He has answered the call, yet he is unsure how it is all to unfold. Still, he goes forward. Listening to, and obeying his heart, John is given a revelation. John's eyes fall upon Jesus and he exclaims, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'. This is not John all of a sudden figuring it out. 'Behold' is the clue. As we learned from the angels in the Christmas story, behold is a clue word for a message, revelation or action of God. ('Behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Mary; Behold, the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph in a dream; and behold, the angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds). It is God who reveals Jesus to John, says who he is, and what his mission will be. First, John recognizes Jesus and points him out. Then he says who he is: 'the Lamb of God. Lastly, his mission is revealed: he will take away the sin of the world.

Not unlike Epiphany, Jesus is revealed as the divine One who will take away the sin of the world. John freely admits that he did not recognize Jesus, but is able to reveal him as the divine One. 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me'. This statement reveals the eternal nature of Jesus: he came after me, but existed before me. Jesus is the preexistent one who lives with the Father. See the prologue of John's gospel. 'In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God'. Now Jesus is revealed to the world as the One who will take away all sin. By saying this, John reveals Jesus as the Messiah, the Anointed One. Only the Lamb of God, who will become a sacrifice for our sins, can restore our unity with the Father.

These truths are known to all of us and are commonly expressed in our Creed, and other prayers at Mass. Still the question remains, how do we recognize Jesus today, witness to him as the Lamb of God, and trust that he will take away all sin? Like John, why is it difficult for us to see and know Jesus more readily?

Many answers are possible, but perhaps the most poignant is perhaps our real desire to see Jesus today and respond to him. Following Jesus is not a surface venture. To know Jesus is to seek him, to desire him, and all that he is and does for us. John eventually recognizes Jesus through the grace of revelation. This revelation to John is built on his desire and willingness to be an instrument of God. Because of his openness, John hears and trusts God's revelation. He speaks the revelation, and fulfills his role in the coming of Jesus.

It is not that different for you and me. If we really are seeking to know and follow Jesus, we too will perceive and hear God's call and revelation to us. It won't be the same as John's, but it will be personal to you as you are before the Lord, willing to serve his purpose.

What keeps us from seeing Jesus in our lives? Are we satisfied with the life of God we have? Is it enough for us, or is there a desire for more? Are we hesitant because of fear, presuming God might ask something beyond our liking? Think about it. Are you the light of God that you want to be, or that God would like you to be? There is always more. God is ever gracious and abundant. If you seek more from the Lord, or wish to do more for God, just speak the word to Him, and trust that God will reply. Act on your desire to be a lively, mature follower of Jesus.

Father John Esper