

This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world

Meditation on the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time¹

By Fr. Gonzalo Meza



On January 15 we celebrate the second Sunday in Ordinary Time. Today's reading talk about the mission of Jesus Christ in this world, and the mission that he entrusted to all of us.

In the year we have four seasons: winter, spring, fall and autumn. In the Church we have the Liturgical Cycle, which could be compared to the seasons, Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, and Easter. Each of these seasons shapes the liturgical life of the Church and our own lives on the outside and on the inside. **On the outside.** During the season of Lent the decorations in the Church are very few. The vestments used by the priests are purple. We fast and abstain from meat on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. These are external signs of penance and sacrifice. In the season of Easter, the Church is profusely adorned with flowers and multiple decorations to express the joy of the resurrection. **On the inside.** "Liturgical seasons" have a common topic expressed in the readings of the Mass. E.g., Lent and Easter are seasons of penance. Christmas and Easter are seasons of joy. On Sundays and weekdays of Easter the Acts of the Apostles we proclaimed (read) at Mass the different narrations of the resurrection of Jesus and his appearances to the disciples in his glorified body.

Ordinary Time. What is the main theme of ordinary time? The ordinary life and the mission of Jesus Christ on earth. The readings of the Mass narrate many details about the ordinary life of Jesus. We listen the stories of Jesus preaching about conversion, announcing the good news of the arrival of Kingdom of God, teaching the people, driving out demons, healing the infirm, forgiving sins. This season is called "ordinary" not because it is less important than the others, but because it is the ordinary life of our Blessed Lord. In the readings of this season we have a wonderful opportunity to get a close approach at Jesus' ministry. Above all, the readings of the Mass gives us the chance to know what Jesus did so that we can imitate his actions in our ordinary life.

Today's readings present the Mission of Jesus Christ and its implications in our life. What is Jesus' mission? The first reading presents a first approach. The prophet Isaiah talks about the mission of the "Servant of the Lord", whom the Church identifies with Jesus, "You are my servant... through whom I show my glory. Now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, that Jacob may be brought back to him, and Israel gathered to him; and I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD. (Is 49:5-6)" Isaiah says that the Servant of Lord will bring people back to God to manifest (epiphany means manifestation) his glory. Why does he need to gather the people and bring them back? Because the evil, the world and the flesh separated people from God. They got dispersed and as a consequence they got

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lost. But according to Isaiah, Jesus' mission was to bring people back to God, to reunite them around him. Cyril of Alexandria said about this: "But when Christ appeared in the world they were gathered through faith... those whom Satan once had scattered and who formerly had deserted their love for God. They had run toward the enemy who produces and pursues sin. Those who had thrown away God's providence of good things are now with Christ at peace."²

To reconcile man with God, his sin needed to be removed. Jesus with his life, passion, death and resurrection was able to do it. In today's Gospel John the Baptist says that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world" (Jn 1:29). How many times do we say this phrase at Mass? Twice, during the "Gloria", and when the priest elevates the host to adore Jesus really present in the Eucharist, before communion "This is the Lamb of God..." John the Baptist remarks that Jesus' main mission was to take away the sins of the world. Jesus offered his life to reconcile us with God. Jesus is at the same time the suffering Servant who silently allows himself to be led to the slaughter and who bears the sin of the multitudes, and also the Paschal Lamb... Christ's whole life expresses his mission: 'to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.'³ By reconciling us with God the Father through the forgiveness of sins, Jesus made us children of God. Every time that we say that phrase at Mass we need to remember that Jesus gave his life for me and for all who accepted him by faith. When we say at Mass "this is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world," we must thank Jesus for removing our sins in baptism and for giving us the opportunity to eradicate sins from our life in the sacrament of confession.

What are the other implications of Jesus' mission in our life? Through the sacraments, mainly Baptism, Reconciliation and at Mass we receive all the benefits of Jesus' mission -especially the forgiveness of sins and his salvific grace. Such grace is freely given by Jesus. We receive it but at the same time we receive a mandate: Jesus made us his disciples so that we can "go and announce the Gospel of the Lord, glorifying God by our lives." This is the mission given to us by Jesus when we were baptized. And that is the mandate that we are obliged to fulfill, that is why the priests repeats it at the end of every Mass as the dismissal "go and announce the Gospel..." Our life in Christ does not end with Mass. It starts with it. We are called to announce the Gospel of God not merely with words with our actions. In other words, we are supposed to do as John the Baptist did, be witnesses of the Lamb of God, announcing the Gospel and glorifying God with our lives."

Where and how do we bear witness. How do we glorify God with our lives?

- **In our relationships with others, seeking always the truth, justice and unity.** When our words and/or actions break with truth ("I am the way, the TRUTH and the Life, says the Lord"), or commit

² Elliott, M. W. (Ed.). (2007). Isaiah 40–66 (p. 114). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Catholic Church. (2000). Catechism of the Catholic Church (2nd Ed., p. 158). Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference.

injustices or break the unity of a community, or a family, we are not bearing witness to Jesus but to the evil one.

- **Having a solid relationship with the Lord.** We cannot bear witness of someone whom we do not know. Therefore our relation with the Lord through prayer, Bible meditation and faith formation is an essential components on our life of faith.
- **Offering up our sacrifices, as Christ did.** “We are called to join our sacrifice to His, to offer our lives as living sacrifices in the spiritual worship of the Mass.” Psalm 40 says, “Sacrifice or offering you wished not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not; then I said I ‘Here I am... To do your will is my delight; my God your law is in my heart.” (Ps 40:7-9) The sacrifice that the Lord wants the most is obedience to his will and commandments. Obedience means to listen to the Lord, that is why it says: “ears open to obedience you gave me... your law is in my heart.”

Jesus forgave our sins in baptism and reconciliation. He made us children of God. As such, we have obligations to fulfill, and one of them is to “Go and announce the Gospel, glorifying God by our lives.” Today we are invited to meditate about how are we accomplishing the mandate that Jesus gave us. How am I bearing witness of the Lord? Do my actions and words are based on truth, justice and unity? If some or all of the answers were no, Do I need to pray more or read the Bible more or learn our Catholic faith better?

Romanos the Melodist, an Easter hymnographer of the VI century talks about the many graces we received in baptism, through the forgiveness of sins:

“Now the garment of mourning is rent; we have put on the white robe,
which the spirit has woven for us from the lamb’s fleece of our Lamb and our God;
Sin is taken away, and immortality is given us, our restoration is clear.
The Forerunner has proclaimed it...

Oh, the message of the Baptist, and the mystery in it!
He calls the shepherd lamb, and not only a lamb, but one to free from mistakes.

Put your hands on him,
All of you who confess your sins,
For He has come to take them away, those of the people, and of the whole world.
For lo, the One whom the Father has sent to us is the One who carries away evil,
Who appeared and illumined all things.⁴”

⁴ Romanos the Melodist, Kontakion of the Epiphany. Elowsky, J. C. (Ed.). (2006). *John 1–10* (pp. 70–71). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.