

2nd Sunday
1/15/2023

SEEING AND RECOGNIZING

Behold the Lamb of God. What does John the Baptist mean? We hear the words, *Lamb of God*, at least five times at Sunday Mass. It can be one of those expressions that we hear so often that we start to lose the significance of its meaning. *Lamb of God* can have many different layers of meaning but in one way or another, John is acknowledging Jesus as the messiah. In a few verses Andrew will say to Simon, *we have found the messiah*. John not only shows who Jesus is, the messiah but what he will do, take away the sins of the world. The messiah will be a redeemer, a sacrifice, a suffering servant who will overcome death with death and open the way to everlasting life.

John sees Jesus but he doesn't recognize him. It's only through the working of the Holy Spirit, that he recognizes Jesus for who he really is. This tells us two important things. 1—Just as we can hear but not listen, so too, we can see but not recognize. 2—We need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to recognize the working of God in our lives so that we may not only see but recognize as well.

In the first reading, Isaiah speaks about the servant of God who is to be the light of the nations. Jesus didn't come to share God's love with one ethnic group, one nation or one race. He came to share God's love with everyone. This is a vision which is *catholic*, that is to say, universal. It is the light of Christ, the Christ in whose light we follow so that God's salvation may reach to the ends of the earth. Jesus comes as a light to the nations, to all peoples. John doesn't say that Jesus' will take away the sins of one nation but rather the sins of the world.

St. Paul in the second reading reminds us that we're to be a holy people not united by race, language or ethnic group but by our faith in Christ. The Eucharist we celebrate draws together many different peoples in Christ. We are all related to each other as members of God's family. Now it's easy to say, I'm not related to that person by blood. And yet we're all related to one another, by blood. We're connected and related to each other by the blood of Christ and for that reason, we're called to continue together and to work through any struggles we may have.

When we come to appreciate the value of this universal dimension, we can also see the anti-values that compromise it. Hatred, prejudice, pornography, human trafficking, abortion, euthanasia, oppression and so many other evils all express this. On Monday with the King holiday, we remember the ugly legacy of racism. The Catechism of the Catholic Church doesn't hesitate to call racism *incompatible with God's design*. In other words, racism is not part of God's plan.

Cataracts block our vision. They can block our vision so much that it can require surgery to correct them. Racism is a type of spiritual cataract that blocks our vision of *who* someone is, by never getting past *what* someone is. Racism has been called the original sin on the American soul and it goes beyond the problems of black and white but involves many groups of people in many different circumstances. But beyond any particular race of people, we are all part of the human race. Whatever our background, together we form one humanity. The mission of Jesus, of Paul and of the Church is to all.

Joseph Ratzinger was known as a world class theologian while still a young man and long before he ever even became Pope Benedict XVI. A major emphasis of his work was the centrality of Christ, something for which he was sometimes criticized. Cardinal Wilton Gregory, the first African-American Cardinal from the United States commenting on the legacy of Benedict XVI said:

Even today, if we see the Lord Jesus living in one another, especially those whose backgrounds are different and language and culture are different, if we can see Christ in them, we've taken a gigantic step toward responding appropriately to racism.

Thus, the ability to see Christ in others is a remedy or at least a bulwark against the anti-value and sin of racism.

As we strive to live lives of intentional faith, may the Holy Spirit guide us in our daily lives, as a country, as the Church as a world, to not only hear Jesus but to listen to him; not only to see him but recognize him at work in our world and to recognize him in one another. May that in turn move us beyond the cataracts of racism to the vision and the freedom of the children of God.