

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time A - "The Wood of the Manger is the Wood of the Cross."
January 19, 2020

We come to Church and notice right away that all the Christmas decorations are gone. I am sure you know where Mary, Joseph and Jesus are, don't you? No, they're not in Egypt. They're in boxes in the storage room. The Christmas season is over. Now we move on with the very beginning of Jesus' public life, usually referred to as his ministry. But is Christmas really over yet or is a new "Christmas" just starting? There is an old saying: "**The Wood of the Manger is the Wood of the Cross.**" John the Baptist seems to understand this and when he sees Jesus, he points to him saying: "***This is the Lamb of God,***" (John 1:29-34). We use that term "Lamb of God" so often, that it is easy for us to overlook the deep theology and the unmeasurable love of our God contained in His sending His Son to be the Lamb. He is wounded for our sins, bruised for our iniquities. He has taken upon himself the punishment that makes us whole and was crucified. That is what John the Baptist meant when he said, "Look, there is the Lamb of God."

By offering his very self for our redemption, Jesus showed us two things. First, he showed beyond any doubt that absolutely nothing we do can ever extinguish his love for us. He died for us while we were yet sinners. The Lamb of God loves us just as we are, and will always love us. We must never doubt that. We must never let anything come between us and Jesus Christ. Whenever we find ourselves doubting his love or goodness, we can be sure it is from the devil, never from God. Second, by giving himself up for our salvation, he showed us the path to happiness. We were created not to indulge ourselves, but to give ourselves. Just like Christ, we Christians are called to lay down our lives for God and our neighbours, to conquer sin and evil by loving, by giving self to others without counting the cost, by forgiving without conditions.

From the very beginning of the world, all creation was entrusted to human beings. Sadly, man, in his selfishness and self-centeredness, perverted the whole purpose of creation. Instead of glorifying God, creation was used to satisfy man's selfish needs. But, God did not take the gift of creation away. A man would once more restore creation to God's original plan. Jesus Christ is this man. Still, some people continue to pervert the purpose of creation. Sadly, sometimes, we join them. We become so wrapped up in ourselves that we push God aside, being more concerned with our selfishness than seeing God's gifts as a means of glorifying Him. As long as we live like this, true love cannot exist in the world. We cannot give ourselves to another if our main concept of how to live is to take, not to give. This is the reason why for some people life is meaningless and frustrating.

Jesus living on earth is the fulfillment of God's plan for mankind. Jesus showed us how to live as the Father wants us all to live. He sacrificed himself completely for others so that we could experience sacrificial love. He called us to use creation as the Father meant creation to be used. In the visions of the fifth chapter of the *Book of Revelation*, a book is brought out sealed with seven seals. The book is God's plan for mankind. But the plan is sealed. "**Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?**", a voice cries out." But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll to examine it. The visionary sheds many tears because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to examine it. But then one of the elders said, "***Do not weep. The lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed, enabling him to open the scroll with its seven seals.***" Then the visionary saw standing in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders, a Lamb that seemed to have been slain. **Only the Lamb was worthy to once more restore God's plan for mankind.**

John the Baptist found his reason for existence. He was to point out the Lamb of God to the world. His mission is the mission of every Christian. We are to point out the Lamb of God to the world. There is nothing greater that any of us can do in our lives than to reveal Christ to others, first to our children and then to all we encounter. John the Baptist was not a typical person of his time. He was extraordinary not because of his attire or diet or even his preaching, it was the fact that he found the

purpose of his life. Our lives can also be extraordinary. The Lord will give us the courage, like John the Baptist, to reveal Christ to the world. **The death of our Lord opened up the Book of God's plan for mankind. He restored our life with God. He conquered sin.** Christ is our King and our Leader. To be his loyal subject and disciple demands outstanding service. It costs no less than everything, even our lives. And so, we too should bravely become Lambs of God - sacrificial offerings on the altar of our own crosses. This self-sacrifice is so central to our faith that the Church reminds us of it in every Mass, when we pray, "**Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.**" Let's pray those words from the very depths of our hearts, appreciating in a fresh way all their beauty and meaning.