

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME; Cycle – A; Jan. 15th 2023
Is. 49: 3, 5-6; 1Cor. 1: 1-3; Jn. 1: 29-34

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

If we go through the four gospels, there we find several Messianic titles used for Jesus. *Among them, Emmanuel, Christ, Son of Man, Son of God, Son of David, Son of Mary, Messiah, and I AM are pretty common.* Though John's gospel is different from the synoptic gospels, he too uses some of these titles. But more than any other titles, John gives a unique title to Jesus through the words of John the Baptist. When we read the synoptic gospels we get the impression that John the Baptist has not recognized the identity of Jesus fully. Whereas in John's gospel, the Baptist is very clear about the identity and role of Jesus. In today's gospel John points out **Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."** No doubt, John sums up the Messianic mission of Jesus in this one verse. John the Baptist repeats this title in the same chapter of John 1:36 also where, showing Jesus to the disciples he says: "*Behold, the Lamb of God.*" And it is to be noted that only in John's gospel we find this Messianic title, "*Lamb of God.*" At the same time, this title is not something the Baptist has invented; rather he borrowed it from the prophecy of Isaiah.

Scripture scholars are of opinion that more than 44 Old Testament prophecies are fulfilled in the person and mission of Jesus. Among them the prominent ones are that of Isaiah. Perhaps you know, most of these prophecies are repeated in the gospel of Matthew and every time Matthew affirms that this prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus. In the four Servant Songs of Isaiah which are scattered in **Is. 42: 1-7; 49: 1-7; 50: 4-11 and 52: 13 - 53: 12, he speaks about a humble, obedient and Suffering Servant who would be the liberator of Israel. But in the Servant Song in Isaiah 53:7 he says, "Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth."** Matthew the Evangelist sees Jesus as the **Suffering Servant**. But John the Baptist could see Jesus as that **Lamb** which was led to the slaughter. The term Lamb sums up the love, sacrifice and triumph of Jesus.

In Israel lamb was not an animal merely used for food or milk; rather it played a big role in the spiritual life of the people. **The lamb had five important religious roles to play in people's life.** The lamb was introduced in the life of Israel for the first time as they were about to be liberated from the slavery in Egypt. Here lamb was sacrificed to celebrate the first Passover and its blood was sprinkled on the door steps as an identification mark. (Ex.12: 11 ff.). The second role of the

lamb is found in Lev. 16: 20-22 where the lamb was brought to the Temple every year on the Day of the feast of the Atonement of sins. Placing his hands on the head of the lamb the high priest transferred the sins of the people on it and later the lamb was driven out in the wilderness to be killed by wild animals. Here the lamb is sacrificing its life so that people may be saved from sins. John could see Jesus in that lamb. Thirdly, in the Temple of Jerusalem hundreds of lambs were sacrificed daily for the atonement of individual's sins and for other spiritual needs and also as thanksgiving to God. The fourth reference we find to the lamb in the writing of Isaiah, as we have already seen where the lamb takes the iniquities of the people and sacrifices its life. (Is. 53: 7). Lastly, the picture of the lamb is used on the Jewish flag of conquerors as a sign of triumph especially during the Maccabean war.

In today's gospel when John the Baptist comments about Jesus: "*Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,*" he kept all these qualities and roles of the sacrificial lamb of the Old Testament in his mind. Towards the end of the gospel John considers Jesus as the Pascal Lamb. In the Book of Revelation alone John uses the title **lamb, 29 times**, each time referring to Jesus. According to John's gospel the death of Jesus took place on the cross exactly when all the Paschal lambs were sacrificed in Jerusalem Temple at noon on the day of the Passover celebration. Whereas, according to the synoptic gospels Jesus died on the cross on the following day of the Passover celebration (Friday).

The world has seen many religious founders and leaders, but none of them volunteered to sacrifice his life for the followers, but only Jesus Christ. Among the many Sacred Books of world religions, gospel is the only Book where we meet a God who comes down to the level of human beings and dies for their sins so that they may be free from the bondage of sin. In his fourth servant song, Isaiah speaks about the sacrificial love and suffering of the Servant of God in these words, **"Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured. He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins, upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole, by his stripes we were healed."**(Is. 53: 4, 5). The Church believes that indeed, Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Before the Communion at every Mass we say three times "Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." And we respond, Have mercy on us; have mercy on us; grant us peace. At the conclusion of it, the priests reaffirm, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world; blessed are those who called of his supper." When we approach the Sacrament of Reconciliation we meet Jesus with the same confidence in hearts that he will take away our sins.