

WORD FOR SUNDAY



Fr. Albert Shamon

Sunday's Readings: (R3) Jn. 1:29-34. (R1) Is. 49:3, 5-6. (R2) 1 Cor. 1:1-3.

The Gospel this Sunday departs from the normal rule of reading Matthew during the Year. Perhaps the reason for this is the importance of Jesus' baptism as another "epiphany" — another manifestation of Jesus as savior of the world.

The excerpt is taken from John's Gospel. John avoids a direct narration of the baptism of Jesus, probably because there was a "baptist" sect around that claimed John to be greater than Jesus. John the Evangelist sought

to correct this impression not only in the prologue to his gospel ("for he himself — John — was not the light") but even in the present passage ("a man who ranks ahead of me, because he was before me").

Instead, John the Evangelist gives the theological meaning of our Lord's baptism as it is expressed in the voice from heaven and in the descent of the dove.

The voice from heaven, "This is God's chosen One," clearly alludes to the identification of Jesus with the servant of Yahweh of Second Isaiah (R1) and with his mission. His mission is not only to a family, nor to a town, nor to a country, but to the whole world. "There is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"

In Hebrew the word for "dove" is "jonah." In the Old Testament the Book of Jonah is the parable which teaches that the mercy of God extends to all nations and not simply to the Chosen People. So in the descent of the dove, we can see an assertion of the universal mission of Jesus at the very beginning of His ministry.

We must remember that the

incident narrated in Sunday's gospel took place the day after a deputation of priests and Levites had come to John asking him, "Who are you? The Messiah? Elijah? The Prophet?"

The Jewish leaders were looking for a Messiah-King who would deliver them from the galling yoke of Rome. Or a fiery leader, like Elijah, who would confront wicked Roman Arabs and Jezebels and bring down fire from heaven upon them. Or the Prophet greater than Moses, who would bring Rome to its knees as Moses did mighty Egypt. In a word, they were seeking a political leader, and all the while what they needed was someone to free them, not from political tyranny, but from the far worse tyranny — the slavery of sin. What they wanted was not what they needed. As always, God knows better than man. So He inspired John to announce the One who is to come, not as the word of God, nor as the Christ of God, but as the lamb of God. "There is the Lamb of God . . ."

The blood of the lamb had redeemed Israel from the cruel slavery of Egypt (Ex. 12).

In Isaiah 53:7 we learn that the

lamb is a man — a man who would take upon himself the sins of men and thus take away the sins of the world.

In today's gospel that man is identified by the Baptist as Jesus of Nazareth.

How did the Lamb of God take away the sins of the world? Unlike men before Him who preached condemnation of sinners, He preached love and mercy and forgiveness. Faced with the strong forces of selfishness and destruction, He loved and healed and touched men into wholeness as the miracle stories show. Jesus confronted sin and defeated it. "He bore our griefs, our sorrows. He was wounded for our transgressions. Upon Him was the chastisement that made us whole" (Is. 53:4-5). In His death He took on sin, took it on himself, felt all the burden of it, became victim of it, died from it.

In doing this, he showed us how to take away the sin of the world: by taking on the sin of others, the burden of it, the pain of being too small. We cannot ignore men in their limitation; we cannot be apart, justified, self-righteous. We, too, have to take

on sin, because that is how it gets taken away. John said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

He takes away the burden of sin by taking on Himself man's limitation.

Sin continues to be overcome when we take it on by accepting ourselves and all men in their limitations. We take it away when we share men's pain, when we make peace and touch men into wholeness.

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Three neighborhood branches of the Rochester Public Library have added morning hours, 9 a.m. until noon, to their schedule. Maplewood Branch, 1110 Dewey, is open Tuesday mornings; Hudson Branch, 1115 Hudson, Thursdays, and Winton, 611 N. Winton Rd., both. Like the other branches, they are open also from 2 until 9 p.m., Monday through Friday. With the institution of Saturday service at the South Avenue Branch, 715 South Ave., all of the libraries are operating from 9 a.m. until 5 p.m. Saturdays.

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