

January 15, 2023
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time
John 1:29-34

The next day John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. He is the one of whom I said, 'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.' I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water was that he might be made known to Israel." John testified further, saying, "I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from the sky and remain upon him. I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

Background:

This Sunday the Church moves from celebrating the Epiphany and the close of the Christmas Season to the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time. The shift is also from the infant child Jesus who is being cared for to the adult Jesus who takes up his ministry. The Church marks this shift by selecting this Gospel text from John's Gospel.

Directly preceding this text, the Jewish authorities have come to John the Baptist asking why he was prophesying concerning the coming of Jesus. The Gospel text begins, "The very next day." While the Gospel does not actually describe the baptism of Jesus, it is the Baptist's testimony to Jesus' baptism and to its significance—that it is a clear and trustworthy sign that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. The text portrays John the Baptist as an eyewitness to the descent of the Spirit upon Jesus, and John saying that the spirit of God told him that when those things happen, it is a sign from God that this person is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.

People of the day brought their disputes to the elders of the community. Those on either side of the dispute would bring their "witnesses" who would, with great passion, present reasons for supporting the side of the person they favored. The side with the strongest witnesses in terms of number, status, and passionate arguments usually carried the argument. John uses this familiar practice in the way he has composed his Gospel. The witnesses he calls upon throughout his Gospel are John the Baptist, Jesus' own works, the Hebrew Scriptures, and God.

In today's Gospel John the Baptist is the key witness. His testimony is important on two levels. He is known as a person who speaks the truth no matter what the cost. By the time John wrote his Gospel, the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod would have been known. He is also known as one who abandoned the temple ministry of his father Zechariah to go out into the desert to preach repentance in preparation for the coming of the Messiah.

There were those who wondered if John himself might be the messiah. Earlier in the Gospel John describes the Baptist this way: "A man named John was sent from God. He came for testimony, to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He was not the light, but came to testify to the light." (John 1:5-8) The Gospel indicates that a great many people came out to be baptized by John. Those opposed to the idea of Jesus as the Messiah, the scribes and Pharisees, also opposed the Baptist and questioned his authority to baptize.

In the verses that precede this text, the evangelist reminds his community of this fact. "When the Jews from Jerusalem sent priests and Levites (to him) to ask him, 'Who are you?' he admitted and did not deny it, but admitted, 'I am not the Messiah.' So they asked him, 'What are you then? Are you Elijah?' And he said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the Prophet?' He answered, 'No.' So they said to him, 'Who are you, so we can give an answer to those who sent us? What do you have to say for yourself?' He said: 'I am "the voice of one crying out in the desert, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,' as Isaiah the prophet said.'" Some Pharisees were also sent to John the Baptist. They asked him, 'Why then do you baptize if you are not the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet?'

John answered them, ‘I baptize with water; but there is one among you whom you do not recognize, the one who is coming after me, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie.’” (John 1:19-27) John the Baptist is a respected and powerful witness to the claim that he is making for Jesus as the Messiah.

Reflection Questions:

1. What do you know about John the Baptist? From what you know, do you think he is a reliable witness?
2. John admits twice in the text, “I did not know him.” How do you understand his statement?
3. John also publicly acknowledges that Jesus is the more significant person, and calls him the Lamb of God, and at the end of the text he calls him the Son of God. Does John’s understanding of himself, his cousin, and his role in scripture shed light on the journey of understanding one’s relationship to God or Jesus?
4. How is the journey of self-discovery before God taking place in your life right now?
5. In the last verse of the Gospel text, John the Baptist states that he testifies to what he has experienced and seen. What is your experience of God working in your life?
6. Can you take some time now to talk with God honestly about your impression of John the Baptist, the testimony he has given here to the importance of Jesus, or perhaps your own understanding of your role of pointing to the presence of God in your world?

The Gospel background and reflection questions are written by Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM. They are edited by Sister Anne Marie Lom, OSF and Joe Thiel. The excerpts from the Sunday readings are prepared by Joe Thiel. To be added to the distribution list, send your name and email address to annemarie.lom@gmail.com

Our Gospel Reflections are hosted by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity. Their homepage is <https://fscs-calledtobe.org/>. One link there is labeled Franciscan Gospel Reflections. A click on the icon will take you to the Gospel reflections for the upcoming Sunday. By following this link, you will be able to blog or comment on the reflection questions. The material will be posted on Fridays and will be available until the following Friday when the new material is posted.

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Excerpts from the readings for January 15, 2023, the Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

The Lord said to me: You are my servant, Israel, 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, and my God is now my strength!
It is too little, the Lord says, for you to be my servant,
to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel;
I will make you a light to the nations,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

*Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.
I have waited for the Lord,
and he stooped toward me and heard my cry.
And he put a new song into my mouth, a hymn to our God.
Sacrifice or offering you wished not,
but ears open to obedience you gave me.
Holocausts or sin-offerings you sought not;
then said I, "Behold I come."*

*"In the written scroll it is prescribed for me,
to do your will, O my God, is my delight,
and your law is within my heart!"
I announced your justice in the vast assembly;
I did not restrain my lips, as you, O Lord, know.*

(From) Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,
to the church of God in Corinth, to you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be holy,
with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said,
"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.
He is the one of whom I said,
'A man is coming after me who ranks ahead of me because he existed before me.'
I did not know him, but the reason why I came baptizing with water
was that he might be made known to Israel."
"I saw the Spirit come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon him.
I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me,
'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain,
he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'
Now I have seen and testified that he is the Son of God."

Excerpts from Isaiah 49:3, 5-6; Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-10; 1 Corinthians 1:1-3; and John 1:29-34

From Joe:

Friends,

Here are the Gospel background and reflection questions for January 15th, as prepared by Franciscan spiritual director Fr. Paul Gallagher. The Gospel, from the first chapter of John's Gospel, relates the moment where John the Baptist first declares, this is the one I was telling you about! John sees Jesus coming and says, "Behold, the Lamb of God! He is the one I said was coming after me who ranks ahead of me. He is the reason why I came baptizing, so that he might be made known to Israel: The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."

The other readings also have references to the revelation of the waited-for savior, sent by God not only for Israel but for all. In the first reading from Isaiah: "The Lord said to me: You are my servant, through whom I show my glory. The Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, that Israel may be gathered back to him. The Lord says, It is too little for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth." Psalm 40 exclaims, "I have waited for the Lord, and he heard my cry. Sacrifice or sin-offerings you sought not, but ears open to obedience you gave me. To do your will, O my God, is my delight. Behold, I come to do your will." The second reading is from the beginning of the first letter to the Corinthians, where Paul writes, "To the church of God, you have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord."

In last week's Gospel for the Epiphany, the Magi reveal Jesus as the savior in his infancy. In this week's Gospel, John the Baptist reveals Jesus as the savior in his adulthood. In John's Gospel, the coming of the Spirit upon Jesus is described to us in John the Baptist's own words. In today's Gospel, we hear that description, and then we hear the Baptist go on to explain further how he understands it: "I saw the Spirit come from heaven and remain upon him. The one who sent me to baptize told me, 'On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he will baptize with the Holy Spirit.'" Once Jesus is revealed as the savior to John, he explains to those who are with him and to those questioning him, that this is the fulfillment of his ministry! "Behold, the Lamb of God! This is the one!"

Joe

> i < May the Word light your way each day!