

January 19, 2020
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's text is from John's gospel and, while it does not actually describe the baptism of Jesus, it is the Baptist's testimony to the baptism and 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 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; and 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 Jesus is 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. What are some questions you would like to ask him about the baptism of Jesus?
3. John admits twice in the text, "I did not know him." How do you understand this statement?
4. John also publicly acknowledges that Jesus is the more significant person, and he 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?
5. How is the journey of self-discovery before God taking place in your life right now?

6. 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?
7. 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://fsc-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 19, 2020, 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