

**2nd Sunday of Year--Cycle A  
(Isa 49:3,5-6; 1 Cor 1:1-3; John 1:29-34)**

**Although last Sunday, the Baptism of the Lord, was officially the end of the Epiphany season, this "second Sunday of the Year" continues the Epiphany theme. Last Sunday we had Matthew's version of the baptism of Jesus; today's gospel continues with John the Baptist's witness to Jesus. He testifies that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, that He ranks ahead of John and was before him, that He will baptize with the Holy Spirit, and that He is the Son of God—all that in one short gospel!**

**Today's first reading from Second Isaiah goes very well with the gospel. It is one of the songs (poems) of the so-called "Suffering Servant"—that mysterious figure who so wonderfully prefigures the career of Jesus. The first of these songs begins, "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased. Upon him I have put my spirit." It goes on to indicate the mission given him by the Lord; he has been called "to bring Jacob back to him and Israel be gathered to him." Yet this is too little for the Servant: He is to be made a light to the nations, "that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."**

**There is so much richness in reading these songs in the light of what Jesus accomplished. The Jews had thought they alone were God's chosen people, but here we see that God's plan of redemption is far broader,**

reaching even “to the ends of the earth.” So there was preparation for the call of the Gentiles, but apparently not quite enough. When Peter, in the Acts of the Apostles, was proclaiming the word to Cornelius and companions, those with Peter were astounded that the Holy Spirit came upon them, just as it had upon the apostles on that first Pentecost. When other Jewish Christians learned of it, they exclaimed with surprise: “So God has granted life-giving repentance to the Gentiles, too!” Today’s first reading also echoes the commission Jesus gives His apostles to be His “witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and even to the ends of the earth.”

John the Baptist’s reference to Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” leads us in two directions. First, this is a reference to the Paschal Lamb, whose blood marked the Israelites and spared them from death when the Egyptian first-born were struck. In John’s passion narrative, the soldiers break the legs of the two thieves crucified with Jesus in order to hasten death. As Jesus’ body hangs on the cross, the soldiers come to break His legs, but when they see He is already dead, they do not. This, John says, comes about so that the Scripture passage might be fulfilled: “Not a bone of it shall be broken”--which of course is not foretold by any of the prophets, but occurs only in the instructions, the rubrics, for the preparation of the paschal lamb, “you shall not break any of its bones.”

**The other direction we see is in the last of the “Suffering Servant” passages; it identifies the Servant as a sinless sufferer, unjustly put to death for the sins of others, just as Jesus was. Mysteriously, the onlookers know that “he was pierced for our sins, crushed for our iniquity”; those for whom the Servant dies “had all gone astray like sheep, all following our own way, But the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all.” As Jesus did not defend Himself before His accusers, so the Servant, “Though harshly treated, submitted and did not open his mouth; like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers, he did not open his mouth.”**

**So the Baptist’s identification of Jesus as “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” points both to the Suffering Servant and to the Paschal Lamb. Matthew very clearly identifies Jesus as the Servant. He quotes Jesus as saying: “whoever wishes to be great among you shall be your servant .... Just so, the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.” And Mark reports the same. John is not so explicit, but Jesus’ action at the Last Supper, i.e., when He washed the feet of His disciples, speaks volumes. If they had been playing charades, He could not have more clearly identified Himself as servant. And after the foot-washing He tells His disciples, “You call me ‘teacher’ and ‘master,’ and rightly so, for indeed I am. If I, therefore, master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another’s feet. I have given you**

**a model, so that just as I have done for you, you should also do.”**

**In the context of Second Isaiah, the Servant is probably a personification of Israel—as suggested in the first reading: “You are my servant,/ in you, Israel, I show my glory.” What the prophet saw in vision, Jesus carried out in reality: the role of the Servant Israel devolved upon Him; in His death and resurrection Jesus was Servant Israel and fulfilled the Servant’s mission.**

**Yet we know that mission is not yet completed: countless people have not yet received the gospel; countless others have formally embraced it but do not live according to its dictates. The completion of the Servant’s mission now devolves upon the new Israel, i.e., on us who claim the name of Christian. Do we take this mission seriously? Recently Our Holy Father Pope Francis issued an exhortation on “The Joy of the Gospel.” It has made quite an impact. While we rejoice to hear it the subject of talk shows and editorials, while we applaud all he says concerning help for the poor and his rejection of “trickle-down economics,” do we take it seriously? In it the Holy Father insists that we should all be actively involved in proclaiming the gospel, that we must not think of the Church’s mission as adequately discharged because there are missionary societies whose function is to spread the word; we are called upon as individuals to do it, too. In the movie about the Pope our community saw Thursday night, Pope Francis is shown as actually doing do a great of**

**foot-washing, both before and since becoming Pope. I don't suggest we can do so much of that, literally, but we can accept role of servant to all. No one could watch that movie without realizing how great is the love the Pope showed to all—and clearly, he was loved in return. We need to be outgoing to all and above all, show the love and interest he obviously felt and manifested.**