

January 19, 2020 Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Bishop Bradley's Reflections on the Sunday Readings

It's hard to believe that we're more than half-way through the first month of this new year, and I'm sure many of you, like me, are still having to backspace/correct each time we write the date, inadvertently as 2019 rather than as 2020---a new year, and a new decade. As we gather together for our weekly Eucharistic celebration, we realize we're in a new Liturgical Season, having returned to Ordinary Time; and the Gospel Reading we just heard takes us back to the very beginning of a "new era", as John the Baptist "hands the baton over", so to speak, to Jesus, when he declares: "*Behold the Lamb of God Who takes away the sin of the world!*" In fact, each of the Scripture Readings we've just listened to challenge us to see things anew---to see life in general and our own lives from God's perspective----to see with a sense of new beginnings in our response to God as People of Faith.

We heard from Isaiah the Prophet in our First Reading reflecting on how even though God had called him to be His servant even from his mother's womb, that God intended him to be much more than a "servant"; rather, he was called to be a "*light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth*". We heard also from the beginning of St. Paul's first Letter to the Corinthians how he had come to an awareness that God's will for him, from the very beginning of his life, was to be an apostle. And finally, from the very first chapter of St. John's Gospel, we heard those powerful words I just referenced a minute ago. We know that John the Baptist himself had been "called" from the very beginning of his life when, while still in his mother Elizabeth's womb, he leaped for joy when Mary, with Jesus in her womb, came to visit Elizabeth. In today's passage, John confesses that even though he knew who Jesus was as a cousin, he did not "know" Who Jesus really was until he saw the Holy Spirit coming upon Him on the day John the Baptist baptized Jesus.

Each of these individuals----Isaiah, the Prophet; Paul, the Apostle/Evangelist; John, the Baptist---had been called by God from the very beginning of their lives, in their mother's wombs, to do this extraordinary work for God in the ordinariness of their lives. And guess what---so has each one of us! We are being reminded at the very beginning of this Ordinary Time of the Year that all of us have a part to play in God's Plan; each of us has been called by God, from our mother's wombs, for a unique and extraordinary purpose in the ordinariness of our lives as well. That may be hard to believe, but that is definitely the truth. Each of our lives has value; each of us is called into life for a reason in God's Divine Plan; and all of us have an eternal destiny. That's quite an extraordinary thought to ponder at the beginning of this Ordinary Time of the Year.

This would also be a good time to think about what a special and eventful week this is as we observe and celebrate a number of important "human life" events.

Tomorrow, of course, is the national holiday honoring the life and witness of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He spent his life and all his energy pursuing a "dream", and of course he died still trying to make that dream a reality. We realize that his dream, so similar to God's Plan---namely that all people are loved and worthy of respect----unfortunately is still far from a reality. Today, we should each pray for an end of racism---in our society, in our relationships, and in our hearts---and to see all people as God sees them: beloved and cherished for who they are.

Yesterday began a very special Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. Each year for more than 100 years, from January 18 to January 25th, Christians are called to pray, and work, for Unity, and an end to the divisions within the Body of Christ. Jesus' Goal was that all those who are baptized and members of His Body, the Church, would be united---would work together to build His Kingdom of justice, love and peace in this world. That's exactly what Jesus prayed for to his Father on the night before He died: "*May they all be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I am in You*". (John 17) We heard St. Paul in today's Second Reading urging unity within the Body when he wrote: "*To you who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus (that is, baptized) and called to be holy, with all those everywhere who call upon the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours*". The divisions within the Body of Christ truly remain a scandal to the world. All Christians of all denominations must pray and do all that we can to restore the oneness of Faith within the Body of Christ, so that the Truth of Jesus will be proclaimed with one Voice throughout the world.

And of course on Wednesday of this week, we are observing the tragic 47th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade Supreme Court decision, which made abortion on demand a legally protected right in this country. Since 1973, more than 60 million unborn babies have been denied that basic right to life---that's an awful statistic and a reality that is diametrically opposed to God's Plan! As followers of Jesus, we must continue to fight against that evil, and to pray for a conversion of the heart of society, as well as individuals within our society, to "see" that God, the Creator and the Source of all Life, has a much different Plan. All our parishes will be celebrating special Masses for the Protection of Human Life and in Reparation for the evil actions against the most defenseless lives of all. I look forward to celebrating our Diocesan Mass at St. Monica Parish (due to the renovation work at our Cathedral) at 6:00 p.m. That would be a great day to make sure to get to Mass wherever you can, and to perhaps offer up that day as a special Day of Prayer and Penance.

Those powerful words of John the Baptist when he pointed to Jesus as the "*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*" are the very same words we hear the priest pray right before we come forward to receive Holy Communion: "*Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him Who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb*". We should make sure that we do precisely that---to "Behold", and to remind ourselves exactly Who is about to come into our hearts, and what it is that Jesus wants to help us do---to rid ourselves of the influence/power of sin, and to respond to Jesus' call to a life of holiness. It's clear to all of us that sin continues to have a very tight grip on each of us, and our world, even as we begin this new year/decade of 2020.

Let us pray today, on this ordinary, frigid, and wintry Sunday that we will truly "**behold**" and recognize Jesus, the Lamb of God; that we will welcome Him into our hearts; that we will allow Him to help us to turn from sin and live in holiness; that we will begin to see life anew, and see Jesus in the life of every human being who God made in His image and likeness. Let us pray that we will continue to follow God's Plan, and choose God's ways of love, justice, peace and reconciliation as the ways that we know we have been "called" to live, from the first moment of our lives within our mother's wombs, until the last moment of our lives in this world, before we return Home to God, our Creator and our Loving Father.

God bless you now and always.