

## **THE IDENTITY OF JESUS: 2<sup>ND</sup> SUNDAY A**

Who was Jesus Christ? Who is Jesus Christ? These are the most important questions we Christians can ask. Today John the Baptist gives us his answers to those two questions. He presents Jesus as 'the chosen one of God', chosen to be 'the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world'. Let's unpack that insight of John into the identity of Jesus. by asking two connected questions: - 1. What is sin? And 2. How does Jesus, the Lamb of God, remove it?

'Sin' is the word we use for anything opposed to the good behaviour God requires and expects of us. In practice, it's about anything dysfunctional, nasty, false, mean, hurtful, and unloving about us. It's the opposite then, of friendly, caring and helpful behaviour, such as we see in those generous men, women, and children, who are always reaching out to the victims of disaster, tragedy, and pain, both here and overseas.

Some bad behaviour distorts our relationships, and hurts not only other people but also ourselves. We could e.g. act in a kind and helpful way to someone in need. But we decide that it's too much trouble and effort, and we can't be bothered. Or we are afraid that someone else might sneer at us if we do go out of our way to help another. So we let the opportunity slip by.

We know we should not judge others harshly. But we get some kind of perverse pleasure in putting others down. This leads us e.g. to slip into our conversation that extra juicy titbit that puts another person in a bad light. We know that certain things we do annoy, hurt and harm others. But we don't care, and we keep on doing them.

We know that we need to make space to be alone with God, and 'hear' what God would say to us. But we use any excuse at all to avoid the quiet and silence needed to make contact with God. Consequently we fail to ask God what God wants of us, or to ask God to empower us to do what God wants of us, cost what it may.

Up till now I've been speaking of the kind of sin that is deliberate and for which we are personally responsible. But much selfish and sinful behaviour comes also from our genes and the environment around us and for which we are only partly responsible. This kind of sin includes different kinds of addictions and compulsions, and habits like gambling to excess that drive us towards making wrong choices.

The seagull cannot be blamed for the oil slick that clogs up its wings and hinders it from flying. Much 'sin of the world' is, in fact, partly environmental and hereditary. We call it 'original sin' for it comes more from our human condition, from our human origins, more than from malice and fully deliberate bad choices. But it is still sin and it can still entangle, trap, imprison and dominate us.

This brings us to the second question: How does Jesus take away both kinds of sin, the deliberate and the not so deliberate? He does it the way we take darkness away – by turning on the light. He does it the way we take loneliness away – by our getting together with other people, good people. He does it the way we take hatred away – by communicating love.

This is not an automatic process. We can choose to live in the dark. We can choose to remain isolated. And we can harbour anger, hatred and resentment, and refuse to get over our negative thoughts and feelings. But Jesus has shown us another way, and empowered us to live another way, his way. He has baptised us with his own Spirit, with the Holy Spirit, the fire of God's love, to empower us to think, feel, and do better.

Perhaps our awareness of all this will make some difference to the way we pray those three petitions at Mass today, just before we receive Jesus Christ and others in Holy Communion. 'Lamb of God,' we will say to the one who sacrificed his life to set us free us from our weaknesses and mistakes, and who sets us free to live in better ways, 'you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.' The peace of a good conscience! The peace of being forgiven, and going forward into the future with a new heart and a new spirit – the Spirit of Jesus dwelling within us! The personal peace that will contribute to world peace!

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