

The Sunday Gospel

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

(Lectionary Year A) John 1:29-34

About today:

In today's Gospel, John the Baptist points away from himself and towards Jesus: "Behold, the Lamb of God." It is a moment of revelation, but also of humility. John does not claim to understand Jesus fully; he simply bears witness to what has been shown to him.

The image of the Lamb of God gathers together sacrifice, gentleness, and deliverance. Jesus is not introduced as a conqueror, but as one who takes away sin by offering himself. From the very beginning of the Gospel, the shadow of the cross is present, yet it is a cross freely embraced, shaped by love rather than violence.

For us, this Gospel invites a quiet but profound question: can we, like John, learn to recognise Christ already present among us and to point beyond ourselves to him?

Gospel Reading

Read the whole passage slowly a few times, keeping one or two minutes of silence between each time.

^{1:29} The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!

³⁰ This is he of whom I said, ‘After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.’

³¹ I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel.”

³² And John testified, “I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him.

³³ I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, ‘He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.’

³⁴ And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.”

Broader Picture:

Our passage is the second part of the “witness cycle” or “sequence” at the start of the John’s Gospel (John 1:19–51). The events narrated here unfold over a symbolic sequence of days, often read as a new creation week.

Before the passage (in 1:19–28), John the Baptist is questioned by priests and Levites. He denies all messianic titles and defines himself solely as “a voice” (Isa 40:3). This sets the negative space: John is not the Christ. In our passage (1:29–34) John moves from denial to declaration. He does not say who he is, but who Jesus is: the Lamb of God, the Pre-existent One, the Bearer of the Spirit, and Son of God. After the passage (1:35–51), John again points to Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God” (1:36).

The effect of his witness becomes visible: disciples begin to follow Jesus. Andrew, Peter, Philip, and Nathanael are drawn into the narrative.

Interpretation Notes:

v.29: “...Here is the Lamb of God...” A more appropriate translation is “Behold the Lamb of God”. The verb *ide* (behold) is not descriptive but performative and imperative. John is not explaining Jesus or asking people to understand; he is simply stating a truth and summoning attention.

In Scripture, “behold” marks a moment where God’s action demands human response through faith (cf. Gen 22:7; Isa 42:1).

v.29: “...the Lamb of God...” The Baptist’s first public word about Jesus is not a biography but a confession of faith. The title “Lamb of God” gathers together several strands of Israel’s Scripture: (a) the Passover lamb (Exodus 12), whose blood brings deliverance; (b) the suffering servant led like a lamb to slaughter (Isa 53:7); and (c) the lamb offered during daily Temple

sacrifices, especially the *tamid* offering (morning and afternoon sacrifice of an unblemished lamb).

Saint Augustine of Hippo insists that Christ is the Lamb “*not because he is weak, but because he is innocent*” (Tractates on John IV). Christ’s redeeming power lies precisely in his sinlessness freely offered.

v.29: “...*the sin of the world...*” The word here is “sin”, not “sins”. This subtle distinction is of great importance. Saint John Chrysostom emphasises the universality this: not sins (plural), but sin (singular) — the whole condition of alienation is addressed by Jesus, not just individual transgressions. Likewise, the redeeming work of Christ is for the whole “*kosomou*” (cosmos, as in world or entire created order) – unlike the *tamid* offering, his sacrifice does not apply to the people of Isreal alone.

This verse grounds the doctrine of objective redemption: Jesus does not simply inspire repentance and good works in his follower, but he acts efficaciously to remove sin.

v. 30: “...*he was before me.*” Here John holds together temporal sequence and eternal priority. Jesus comes after John in history, yet before him in being. In this verse we have a seed of the Nicene faith: Christ is not merely greater than John in dignity but prior to him, existing forever and sharing in the divine life.

v.31: “...*I myself did not know him...*” This statement surprises us. John knows Jesus biologically, yet he claims not to know him as the Messiah apart from revelation.

Saint Gregory the Great comments that John’s ignorance safeguards the truth of his witness: recognition comes by God’s initiative and revelation, not human familiarity – not even being part of the same extended family.

In Luke 1:39-45 (Mary’s visit to Elizabeth) John leaps in his mother’s womb at the arrival of Mary carrying Jesus. This is interpreted in the light of divine revelation, as Mary’s greeting carries the voice of divine revelation.

v.31: “...I came baptising with water...” The second part of this verse identifies the baptism offered by John, and the prophet’s message of repentance that went with it, as part of the preparation for Jesus. Yes, the community around John may have worked for the restoration of proper worship and religion in Israel, but the ultimate goal of the Johannine ministry is to pave the way for Christ. St Augustine stresses that John’s baptism is instrumental, but not sufficient: it prepares for revelation but does not itself confer the Spirit.

v.32: “I saw the Spirit descend...” This is not an account of Jesus’ baptism in the Fourth Gospel, yet here we find a testimony which ties in with the narrative presented by the other gospels. The dove recalls Genesis 8 – a sign of new creation after the flood. Saint Cyril of Jerusalem notes that just as the dove announced peace to Noah, so the Spirit announces reconciliation in Christ.

v.32: “...it remained on him...” The key word for John is “remained” (μένειν) – the Holy Spirit does not visit temporarily but abides with Jesus, signalling the fullness and permanence of Christ’s mission. Also, the Spirit rests on him so that it may later be poured out on the Church.

The same verb about stable presence can be found later on in the gospel applied to our relationship with Jesus. In John 15:9 where Jesus says, “*remain in my love*” (often translated as “*abide in my love*”).

v.33: “...he who baptises with the Holy Spirit...” John explicitly contrasts his baptism with Christ’s. The first one brought forgiveness of sin, the second both forgiveness and new, divine life through the Holy Spirit.

This verse is foundational for sacramental theology: Christ alone is the true minister of Baptism; the Church acts as his instrument.

v.34: “...well pleased...” At the end of this passage, John culminates his confession of faith speaking as a witness in court – “*I have seen and I testify*”.

Faith, in perspective of the Fourth Gospel, spreads through witness, not coercion. John the Baptist does not compel belief; he offers truthful testimony and steps aside.

Further Thoughts: John 1:29 and the Eucharist

John 1:29 – “Behold the Lamb of God” – has exercised deep and enduring influence on the Church’s Eucharistic consciousness, because it stands at the intersection of sacrifice, recognition, and invitation.

At Mass, the words “This is the Lamb of God” or “Behold the Lamb of God” are proclaimed after the Fraction (the moment when the host is broken) just before Communion is offered.

This placement is theologically precise. At that point

- the sacrifice has been made present through the Eucharist Prayer,
- the true Lamb now stands before the people,
- the Church does not explain him but points.

The priest here speaks in the voice of St John the Baptist, not in his own name. St Augustine explicitly draws this parallel: “*The Church speaks today what John spoke then, lest Christ be present and unrecognised.*”

This logic undergirds Eucharistic realism: Communion is not a symbolic remembering of sacrifice or a mental exercise of the faithful but actual participation in the once-for-all self-offering of Christ. Thus, St Augustine connects sacrifice and sacrament: “*The same Christ is both the priest and the victim; the sacrifice once offered is daily received.*”

Questions for this week:

- *John says, “Here is the Lamb of God”.*
Do I approach the Eucharist as something familiar and routine, or as a living encounter with the Lamb of God?
- *“Who takes away the sin of the world”.*
How consciously do I link my reception of Communion with Christ’s healing and purifying work in my life?
- *Abiding: “The Spirit remained on him”.*
How might regular reception of the Eucharist be shaping (or resisting shaping) my patterns of desire, relationship, and service?
- *Mission: From altar to world.*
In what concrete ways might my Eucharistic life be calling me to greater self-giving, patience, or reconciliation this week?

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