



January 15, 2023

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time

"Behold, the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world."

John 1:29



Dear Friends,

Joseph Ratzinger, Benedict XVI Emeritus Bishop of Rome, was buried last week. It has been reported that the last words he said were, *"Jesus, I love you."* He was the last of the major theological participants at the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This was the major event that reshaped the Church in modern times. Although he was not one of my favorite personalities of the Council and post Council period, he helped to shape our understanding of Christian faith in the modern world. As a theological expert, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and finally as Pope Benedict XVI, he has guided us with important insights.

In the beginning of his first papal pastoral letter, *"God is Love,"* Benedict insists that Christianity is about Christ. *"Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and decisive direction."* Christian faith is not about seeing Jesus as a great moral teacher, or enforcing a code of conduct, or the one who writes down what God dictates to him. Rather Jesus is an encounter with the Kingdom of God in a person. Christianity is a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. Christianity is about relationship of love.

In his book *Jesus of Nazareth*, Joseph Ratzinger says the true center of Christ's personality is he is the *"Son of the Father."* Christ is his relationship with the Father: he receives all of himself from his Father. It is this bond, we call the Spirit, that Christ's divine sonship is expressed as communion with others. His entire being is existing for others. This is not merely part of who he is, but it is the essential dynamic of his person. Ratzinger believes to be Christian is not so much to "do good," or to agree to certain doctrines, but to become, like Jesus, a son or daughter of the Father. Our response is always preceded by God's loving invitation and gift. Our faith is a loving friendship with Jesus. In turn we lead others to this friendship.

In our passage from the Gospel of John, the Baptizer wants to introduce us to the one with whom we are invited to form a friendship. John the Baptist calls Jesus the *"Lamb of God."* This richly describes Jesus in the imagery of the Jewish Passover. Passover celebrates the liberation of God's people from grinding servitude to the leisure and freedom of God's children. God will establish a Kingdom not built on the backs of slaves. The Kingdom is not earned but is a gift, freely and generously given. To be saved is to receive in friendship the love of Jesus.

In his own Passover, Jesus takes us by the hand and leads us from sin, disappointment, death, and despair to a new life lived in hope, justice, joy, and peace. Jesus as the *"Lamb of God,"* recalls the last chapters of John's Gospel. Jesus dies on the cross as the lambs are slaughtered in the Temple for the Passover meal. As the Paschal Lamb, Jesus is our nourishment and life. His self-gift is the perfect expression of existing for others.

During the Eucharist the priest-celebrant repeats the invitation of John the Baptist, *"Behold, the Lamb of God."* We remember that we have been baptized into the dynamic of Christ's dying and rising. The Eucharistic meal is our Passover and *"Communion with the flesh of the risen Christ..."* (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1392) We have been immersed into the generous, life-giving, friendship of Jesus. We love Jesus and like our brother become nourishment for others as true children of his Father.

Peace,

Fr Ron

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