

Homily by Deacon Steve Livingston

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - January 19, 2020

IS 49:3, 5-6; PS 40:2, 4, 7-8, 8-9, 10; 1 COR 1:1-3; JN 1:29-34

I hope you all had a joyous and blessed Christmas. But now ... as I'm sure you all noticed ... as you entered the Cathedral ... the beautiful Christmas lights and decorations are all gone ... packed up and stored away until next Christmas. The décor has changed. Father and I are wearing green vestments instead of white. Why? ... because we are now celebrating what we call "**Ordinary Time**". And why do we call it "**Ordinary Time**"? We call it "**Ordinary Time**" simply because it is not Advent. It is not Christmas ... or Lent ... or Easter ... or one of the high solemnities. We had to call it something so ... "**Ordinary Time**" it is! But ... **what a misnomer!** Especially when you consider that each Sunday of "**Ordinary Time**" we celebrate the great stories of our salvation history ... especially the precious moments of our Savior's life on earth ... of which every **second** was **extraordinary!** But ... "**Ordinary Time**" it is.

Our first reading comes from the great prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was the prophet who ... when the Lord asked, "Whom shall I send?" ... Isaiah responded: "Here I am; "send me!" ... bringing to mind our psalm response ... "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will."

The reading is from one of Isaiah's "Servant Songs". The Lord expresses His love for Israel telling them that through them He would be glorified. But rather than Israel being the **only** nation favored by the Lord ... they are told that through **them** ... God's grace would shine forth for the whole world! The nation would once again be gathered from all the foreign lands from which they had previously been scattered and returned to their own land in preparation for the birth of the **suffering servant** who was to be the instrument of salvation for the whole world. This prophesy would, of course, be fulfilled by Jesus Christ.

Like I said ... Christmas is gone! Our Savior is no **longer** a child. He has become a man. He has been baptized by John and ... is about to enter into His public life. The prophesy of Isaiah is about to be fulfilled. We think of Jesus as the Son of God and the Messiah ... yet ... He looked much like any other thirty-year-old young man. He looked quite **ordinary**.

In our Gospel today Jesus once more comes within sight of His cousin, John the Baptist. Even before Jesus had come to John to be baptized, God had revealed to him: "On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit." Then at Jesus' baptism John saw the Holy spirit come down over Jesus in the form of a dove. John, gazing at this very ordinary looking young man, might well have recalled the Father's words from our first reading, "You are my servant...in whom I shall be glorified ... I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

So now ... John sees Jesus and makes a declaration to all those with him. He does not say this is the Christ or this is the Messiah. No ... John sees Him and declares: "Behold, the **Lamb of God**, who takes away the

sin of the world ...” ... on the surface a most peculiar greeting, perhaps to our ears ... but for the Jewish people of Jesus’ time the lamb had great significance. It was not merely a gentle barnyard animal. Ritually, a one-year-old male lamb would take the place of the people. They would put all their sins on lamb’s back, lead him to the altar and slit his throat. His blood would flow over the altar ... washing away all their sins. John’s words were indeed prophetic ... for through Jesus ... that perfect “Lamb of God” ... the perfect sacrifice for sins would be offered once and for all.

John had devoted his entire life to preaching repentance and now he had fulfilled his life’s mission to point out and reveal Jesus that “He might be made known to Israel.” We will hear no more about him ... except his arrest and execution by Herod Antipas. Like Isaiah before him, John had dedicated his entire life to doing God’s will.

In our second reading we find St. Paul writing to the community of converts in Corinth. Corinth was a city about the size of Las Vegas. Some call Las Vegas “**Sin City**” but Corinth had more than **earned** such a title for it was populated by people from all over the world who had brought with them their many gods ... with their human sacrifices and other abominable practices. Fully 2/3 of the population were slaves. The tiny community of Christians was under constant pressure to **abandon** this new alien religion, so Paul was writing to encourage and support them in their faith. Paul, too, like Isaiah, John and Jesus before him ... had abandoned his previous life to dedicate his life to doing God’s will by preaching Jesus Christ crucified.

Isaiah, John, and Paul might well have sung: “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.” We too sing these words as we did a few minutes ago ... but **living** them in our world today is not easy. In the wisdom of our world these words are foolishness. They mean taking time in prayer to **discern** God’s will. They mean **giving up** whatever in our lives that is **not** in accord with God’s will. And they mean **witnessing** to Christ ... before others ... in our homes ... in our schools ... in our work places. May God grant us the grace and courage to say and to truly **live** the words: “Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will.”