

The Servant Lamb

The baptismal theme which filled our thoughts last week continues to offer us further insights as we venture forward into this new year of faith. John the evangelist presents us with a very particular image of Jesus, one which through the Baptist's words *Look; the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*, identifies Jesus quite precisely with the Suffering Servant of Isaiah. Clearly they call to mind that suggestive image of the servant's task, as we are told: *We had all gone astray like sheep...and the Lord burdened him with the sins of us all. Harshly dealt with he bore it humbly...like a lamb that is led to the slaughter house*. Here at the beginning of his gospel, John plants the seed in our minds which helps us to understand the mission of Jesus; a mission that is handed on to us to carry forward. John's gospel is itself a majestic exploration of this mission.

The gospel can be divided into two parts; the Book of Signs and the Book of Glory. The Book of Signs narrates seven events or happenings, (John doesn't call them miracles), as a way of showing us how through his actions of challenging, changing, healing, curing and restoring, Jesus brings us into a new relationship with God. This new relationship asks us to examine our selves and our lives in the light of the how we are challenged, changed, healed, cured and restored by encountering Jesus. The symbolism of what is taking place in the exchanges Jesus has with the cripple, the court official's son and the blind man, are models for us as we meet Jesus, just as the changing of water into wine, the multiplication of the loaves and the walking on water, reveal to us the incarnate word of God made flesh, and these events challenge us to make our choice about Jesus and about who we believe he is. Ultimately, in the raising of Lazarus, we see how this challenge transcends even death itself, as through our belief in Jesus death is no longer to be feared. In all of this we can see a very clear baptismal evocation of how in faith we are to *die to sin and live to righteousness*. If then we understand how the reality of sin in our lives is overcome, the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper, in the Passion and through the Resurrection as described in the Book of Glory, are themselves sacramentalised most perfectly in both baptismal and Eucharistic participation. It is in baptism that we are born into the new life of Christ, and in Eucharist we are fed, nourished and renewed in that image of the servant who by offering himself takes away our sin.

The Gospel of John concludes with an epilogue in which the reconciling power of the Risen Lord is offered by language which harks back to the vision that the Baptist portrays of the Lamb of God who takes away our sin. Peter on the shores of Lake Tiberias is asked three times if he loves Jesus and three times he affirms his love. He is then given the mission to feed the lambs, feed the sheep. As we pray with and alongside our fellow Christians for unity in this week for Christian Unity, perhaps the image of the servant lamb, reconciling and restoring us through change, cure and healing can become one which challenges us to heed Christ's prayer that we may all be one.