

Homily 2nd Sunday Yr A: Jesus Servant, Savior & Eucharistic Lamb of God

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In our 1st Reading from ch. 49 of Isaiah: *“The Lord said to me, ‘you are my servant, Israel, through whom I show my glory.’”*

Here we learn that God calls the nation of Israel His “servant.”

But then Isaiah goes on to say: *“the Lord formed me as his servant from the womb. . . .”* Who is this servant? It is a prophecy of Jesus, whom we know was formed in the womb of Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And Isaiah goes on to say: *“It is too little, the Lord says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore Israel. I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”*

In these words we see a prophecy regarding Jesus as future Savior – not only of Israel, but of all peoples of all nations throughout the world.

If you keep on reading from the book of Isaiah, in chapters 52 and 53, the Prophet tells us that this “servant” will suffer and die to pay the price for our sins:

“It was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured. . . He was pierced for our offenses, crushed for our sins. Upon him was the chastisement that makes us whole. By his bruises we were healed. We had all gone astray like sheep . . . the Lord laid upon him the guilt of us all. Like a lamb led to the slaughter, or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.” (Is. 53: 4-7).

Yes, Jesus, the Eternal Son sent by the Father, was the innocent Lamb who was led to the slaughter to pay the price for our sins.

God revealed all this in the Old T. in types and figures. The greatest of these types was the Passover lamb described in ch. 12 of the Book of Exodus. If the Hebrews killed a young male lamb, sprinkled its blood on their door posts, and then ate the flesh of the lamb, they would be saved from the punishment God inflicted on the Egyptians: the Angel of death would pass over their homes and not kill their firstborn sons.

Jesus is the fulfillment of that Old T. type. This is what John the Baptist confirms in our Gospel today. When Jesus begins His public ministry and appears at the Jordan River to be baptized, His cousin John points Him out: *“Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.”*

Yes, Jesus is the true Lamb of God, who saves us by the shedding of His Blood on the Cross. He atones for all of our sins, and redeems or buys back that share in God’s divine life that was lost through Adam’s sin.

And just as in the Old Covenant under Moses, the Hebrews’ firstborn sons were saved from death if each household ate the flesh of the Passover lamb, so we will be saved, and raised up on the Last Day, in bodies glorified, if we partake of the Body and Blood of Jesus, the True Lamb.

This is precisely what Jesus tells us. In ch. 6 of John’s Gospel, the “Bread of Life” discourse, Jesus speaks these amazing words to the crowds of Jews:

“Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life within you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink.”

At hearing these words, almost everyone, including most of His own disciples, walk away in disbelief. *“This is a hard saying; who can accept it?”* they say. The only ones who remain with Jesus are the 12 Apostles.

A hard saying, indeed! *“Eat my flesh and drink my blood, if you want eternal life.”*

Last week was the Feast of Epiphany. I always use that feast to preach about faith in the great mystery of the Eucharist. I did so last week. Today I will repeat what I said last Sunday.

Belief in the great mystery of the Eucharist requires great faith, a faith even greater than the Magi, or three Kings.

They prostrated themselves before the Baby Jesus, believing that He was not only their King, but their God and their Savior who would die for their sins, and therefore should be worshipped and adored.

Their gifts signify this belief: gold for their King, incense for their God, and myrrh to anoint His body after death.

How the Magi knew these things remains a mystery to us.

With the great mystery of the Holy Eucharist, we must have an even greater faith than the Magi: Although they could not see the divinity of the Christ Child, they could see His humanity.

In the Eucharist, we see neither the divinity nor the humanity of Jesus. After the words of consecration by the priest, the appearance of bread and wine still remain visible to us; but in faith we believe that the substance of the bread and wine are gone;

that by divine power, when the priest, acting in the Person of Christ, utters those words that Jesus spoke at the Last Supper – *“This is my body which will be given up for you . . . this is my blood of the new and everlasting covenant”* – the bread and wine undergo a change of substance (which we call *transubstantiation*).

The great miracle of the Eucharist defies our senses: The consecrated Host still looks and tastes like ordinary bread, but it is no longer bread; in faith we believe it is now the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ.

Why do we believe what is contrary to our senses? Because Jesus said it; and the Church for 2000 years has taught this truth, this great mystery.

The bishops of our country have called for a three-year program in which we are called to “rediscover the Eucharist.” I suppose the word “rediscovering” can be interpreted in various ways.

Those who have lost or abandoned faith in the Eucharist should make an effort to rekindle their faith.

Those who already believe should strive to deepen their faith, to uncover more and more the unfathomable riches in this great Sacrament.

How can we, who believe, deepen our faith in this Mystery of the Eucharist?

One way is by our actions of adoration:

When we genuflect, bend the knee, when we come into church and leave our pews, we attest to our belief that Jesus is truly present in the tabernacle.

When we kneel before our Lord and our God in receiving Holy Communion.

When we spend time in prayer and adoration before our Eucharistic Lord, speaking to Him heart to heart, knowing that He is present before us as truly as He was present to the Magi who adored Him and to crowds who heard Him preaching in their streets and synagogues.

If you've never spend time in prayer and adoration before Jesus in the Eucharist, I encourage you to do so. Just a reminder, we have Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament in our church here every Friday after Mass throughout the day; and on first Fridays of the month we continue exposition until 6 AM Saturday morning.

I encourage you to come and spend time before our Lord in the Eucharist. You'll find great comfort and peace in doing so. Pray the Rosary, read some Scripture or the writings of a saint; or just sit in silent contemplation of Jesus, who is truly Present before your eyes.

Another way to be discover or deepen your faith in the Eucharist is through study: Try to learn about Eucharistic miracles. Go on the Internet, on FORMED (see the bulletin). Or attend a class. In February, I'll be teaching a class on Pope St. Paul VI's encyclical, "The Mystery of Faith" (on the Eucharist).

On Tues. June 6, author and EWTN guest Michael O'Brien will come and do a presentation on Eucharistic miracles.

Finally, today after Mass we will have Benediction. And will expose the Blessed Sacrament in the monstrance briefly on the altar to worship and adore Him, and then administer a blessing with Our Lord in the Eucharist.

This is something I plan to do on a monthly basis during this time of "rediscovering the Eucharist," along with preaching on this topic.

Let us call upon the Blessed Virgin Mary, under her beautiful title "Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament," that she – who taught the Apostles and first Christians about the deep mystery of Jesus in the Eucharist – to deepen our faith and devotion to Our Lord and Savior truly Present in the great Sacrament of His Body and Blood.