

Second Sunday of Ordinary Time: He Alone Takes Away the Sins of the World

John the Baptist pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold the Lamb of God. This is the one who takes away the sins of the world." The expression John used is so familiar to us all that it may have lost its impact. After all, every time that we prepare for communion we hear the priest say, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world." What do we mean by this? Are we merely speaking figuratively or is there a concrete application of this concept to reality here in the twenty-first century?

Throughout human history, there have been multiple attempts to heal society, to take away the sins of the world. I want to begin today by pointing out three of these attempts from the last century. All three were complete failures.

The first was prohibition. In the beginning of the century it was clear to many people that alcohol abuse was destroying people, families and society. Criminal behavior, wife and child abuse, homelessness and unemployment were all blamed on alcohol. Prohibition was seen as the lamb that would eliminate the sin of the world. State after state listened to the cry, "Save the Children, prohibit the sale of alcohol." It took an amendment to the constitution, but in 1920 the people of the United States agreed to prohibition, and alcohol was banned. What happened? Did society reform? It appeared to for a brief while, but then alcohol production and sales became the mainstay of the bootlegger and criminal. Uncontrolled by the government, even children were able to buy alcohol in their school yards. Criminal behavior was more widespread than ever before. The United States became a very unsafe place to live. On top of this, the government was losing money it would have normally received by taxing alcohol. Before the income tax became law in 1913, tax on alcohol was a main source of government funding. In 1933, prohibition was repealed. This attempt to take away sins of the world was a failure.

The second was communism. Much of the history of the last century was dominated by communism or the reaction to communism by the German Nazis and Italian fascists putting them into power and then leading to the Second World War. The communists saw inequality in society between the rich and the poor and claimed that the poor were doing all the work and the rich were getting all the benefits. Their solution was to take the property of the rich and distribute it throughout the country. All would be equal comrades. What they ended up doing was destroying all incentives for people to work as well as create a rich political caste. Over twenty million people died, the white Russians, as a direct result of the new policies. In order for the people to see the commune government as their great savior, religion was largely eliminated or, at least, severely repressed. But the government could not take away the sins of the world, and by 1990 communism imploded or was transformed into a form of capitalism as still experienced in various countries. This attempt to eliminate the sins of the world and heal society was a complete failure.

The third was relativism. The end of the last century saw a movement mostly in the western world to eliminate guilt through a rejection of morality. We still are

experiencing this movement. Relativism has become common as many claim that there are no universal truths. Political correctness has become gospel. A recent study of university students states that the vast majority of students define truth as whatever a person says a truth is. The complete rejection of morality was thrown into the faces of moral people through what had been called the sexual revolution. But the era of free love did not bring peace and joy. Instead it has brought turmoil and pain. Love, true love, is not free. It comes with the cost of sacrifice. The sexual revolution healed nothing. Nor did it eliminate sin by saying sin didn't exist. It merely caused more pain as it multiplied sin in the world.

John looked at Jesus and said, "Here is the one who takes away the sins of the world." John was referring to the Suffering Servant of Isaiah who would sacrifice his life to win his people from the power of the devil, from sin. He was pointing to Jesus, declaring that Jesus, whose name means *God Saves*, is in fact the Savior. "You have been sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy," St. Paul tells the Corinthians in today's second reading. If we stay united to Christ, then He, the Savior, will heal the ills of society through us. If we instead put our trust in other people, we will be disappointed and will not become vehicles of healing. There is a saying that sometimes people look for love in all the wrong places. Well, similarly, many people look for deliverance from evil in all the wrong places. As a result eyes are closed to gross immorality. We all feel overburdened by the ills of society, and the pressure of living a just moral life among those who give lip service to religion.

Mankind cannot solve its own problems. It can make attempts, but ultimately, mankind will fail. Mankind is in bondage to a force more powerful than it. Mankind is in bondage to the devil and the force of sin, the force of evil. Other men cannot save mankind. Only Jesus can save us. He is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We need to look to Jesus for healing, and for redemption from sin.

We put our trust in the Lord. We are People of God. We are holy, sanctified by Jesus Christ. We unite our every decision to Him. We ask, "How would this course of action magnify the Presence of Jesus Christ in the world?" We need to listen to John the Baptist and behold the Lamb of God. We need to recognize the power of the Lord. He and he alone rescues us from sin.