

Second Sunday – Ord A – 2017

There are some very colorful words from the Yiddish language that have found their way into the English language. ...Words like *klutz...schmooze...tush* – that’s the part of your anatomy that’ll start to **squirm** in your pew if I talk too long...My favorite Yiddish word is *chutzpah*...A person with chutzpah will do or say things that require a lot of nerve, that can be a little risky...Now, I’m not one who takes a lot of risks, so I rarely act with any chutzpah...But, there was one time when I did, & it paid off in a big way....It was in high school & I had this girl I really liked, & I was trying to figure out a way to kiss her for the 1st time...I didn’t want to just ask her, because I was afraid she’d say “no!” ... So, instead, I said to her, “I’ll bet you a quarter I can kiss you without touching you.”...Lucky for me, she took the bet,..So I went ahead & planted a little smooch on her cheek,...then handed her the quarter....Pretty smooth move, eh?...**I used a little chutzpah, took a risk, & it worked; that little girl’s been mine ever since. Over 53 years...& over \$20K in quarters...** In today’s Gospel, we see a little bit of chutzpah from John the Baptist.

John was standing with some of his followers, & as Jesus walked toward them, John pointed to Jesus & said, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" ...Talk about chutzpah. ...Did John really think the people would take him seriously?...There was nothing about Jesus’s appearance that would make them think He was anything special.... Can’t you just hear them? ...”John, you got some nerve, telling us this carpenter from Galilee is gonna get rid of all the sin & evil in the world. He doesn’t look like much of a fighter to us.”...Well, maybe they were right...When Jesus came into the world, tyrants ruled the land, tax collectors were gouging the people, & the poor were being oppressed....After Jesus left, tyrants still ruled the land, tax collectors were still gouging the people, & the poor were still being oppressed....The world hadn’t changed...So, was John full of chutzpah? ...No! ...The Bible doesn’t tell us when the Lamb of God will free the world of sin & evil, but it does tell us it will happen...The Book of Revelation vividly foretells how Jesus will some day return to vanquish the forces of darkness & evil.

But what about right now? Do those words - “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” – have any meaning for us today? They sure do!... In putting those words on the lips of John the Baptist, the gospel writer was identifying Jesus with the spotless lambs that Jews had for centuries offered as sacrifices at the temple,...& with Isaiah's prophecy of the suffering servant - an innocent lamb led to the slaughter ...Jesus would become the sacrificial lamb, shedding His blood on the cross for our sins,.. taking the punishment in our place, making it possible for us to be forgiven. ...If not for the Lamb of God, our sins would separate us from God forever.

Now a lot of people ask, “Couldn’t God have done that some other way? Why did He have to send His Son to suffer & die on the cross?...Why couldn’t Jesus just have died in His sleep?”...Well, I’m not 1 to tell God what He should do, or shouldn’t do,...& no one can ever know the mind of God,... but I believe - as many do - that God did it that way to show us: (1) how much He hates sin; and (2) how much He loves us ...All the lecturing & preaching in the world couldn’t get those two points across to the human race like the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross...We can ignore the lecturing & the preaching,... but we can’t ignore the Son of God on the cross.

So, for 20 centuries we have memorialized Christ’s sacrifice at every Mass. At every Mass, the priest raises the Body of Christ & echoes the words of John the Baptist: *Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those who are called to the supper of the lamb.* And we respond, “Lord I am not worthy that you should cum under my roof, only say

the word & my soul shall be healed.”...When we make this response, we should do more than just mouth the words.

Think about it. There in the priest's hands is not a simple piece of bread; it is the same Jesus Christ who stood before John that day,...the same Lamb of God, ready to heal our soul, .. ready to forgive the sins that make us unworthy to receive Him...And that will happen if we truly mean the words we say, acknowledge our sins, hand them over to Jesus, & ask for His forgiveness.

Now, admitting our sins is somewhat out of step with our modern culture...because the word “sin” isn't PC...Many people find it hard to accept responsibility for the choices they make. ...They don't sin, they just make mistakes....But the Bible & the Church are old-fashioned. They teach that any willful transgression of od.'s commandments is a sin...When we downplay or deny our sinfulness, ... when we act as though we have no sins that need forgiving,...then we have no need for the Lamb of God. He's irrelevant. He went through all that suffering for nothing.

There's a true story about the time the emperor of Prussia, Frederick the Great, was visiting Potsdam Prison... As he spoke with the prisoners, each one claimed to be innocent (*what a surprise*),...& blamed someone else for their plight.... Except for this one man who surprised the emperor when he said, "Your majesty, I deserve to be here. I'm guilty. No one is at fault but me." Hearing this, the emperor shouted to the prison warden: "Get this scoundrel out of this prison at once - before he corrupts all these innocent men."...That man was set free because he admitted his guilt. That's how we will be set free....When we admit & confess that we have acted against God's way, we are freed to begin all over again with a clean slate - washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.

And after we have been freed from our sin and guilt, then comes the hardest part...You might have heard me tell about the time my daughter Carrie was very little, & she got a sliver in her finger. ...I took her into the bathroom & got out the needle and tweezers, some first-aid spray, and a Band-Aid...She looked at all of this and she didn't like what she saw: "Daddy, I only want the Band-Aid." ...Sometimes we are just like that. We come to God with our sins, but all we want is the Band-Aid – forgiveness...We want to skip the treatment because we know it can be painful.

That treatment is repentance...Repentance means a complete turn around... It's not enough to just say "I'm sorry, Lord."...We have to make changes...We have to get our life moving in the right direction so that we don't fall into the same old patterns of sinful behavior that can hurt others, ourselves, & our relationship with God...Jesus knows how hard this can be; ...He knows we can't do it alone. That's why He's given us the Sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist. Strengthened by the graces of these sacraments, we can do the hard work of repentance, turn away from sin, and let Jesus the Lamb of God help us stay on the right track.

And when we do, it'll be as if the old sins had never happened. God will forgive and forget as He promised in Jer. 31: "I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sins no more." ...And if we fall down again & we come to God in sincere contrition, seeking forgiveness, He won't pull out his clip-board & say, "Hmm, I've already forgiven you 316 times." God won't remember.

One final thought...If we ever feel that something we've done is so bad that God can't possibly forgive us, we need only remember how Jesus – as He hung on that cross - forgave His executioners...It would be the height of chutzpah for us to think any sin we commit is greater than God's mercy.... And for that we should fall on our knees every day & thank the precious Lamb of God...who came to take away your sins, my sins, the sins of the whole world. AMEN