

2nd Sunday of the Year, A Cycle homily 1-19-14

Look at the person next to you and say one word: BEHOLD!

When someone says “Behold” to you, what is your reaction? “Behold” is a word which gets your attention. In scripture we find the word behold is used to announce the presence of the divine.

- **For example, the angel Gabriel uses the word behold to announce to Mary that she would be the mother of God.**
- **Again, the angels use the word as they announce to shepherds in the field in Bethlehem the birth of Jesus. (Behold, you shall find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.)**
- **In today’s gospel we again hear the word, BEHOLD, and this time it is spoken by John, the Baptist.**

When I hear the word, behold, my first reaction is. Behold WHAT?

What is the message from God that John the Baptist is giving us?

John says, “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” These familiar words of scripture reveal to us that John has found the person who can take away the sin of the world.

Notice that phrase “who takes away sin of the world”.

- John does not say the “sins” of the world, but the SIN, the S-I-N of the world. What is the great sin of the world John is talking about.

The most basic sin of the world, the sin which underlies all other sins, is told to us in the story of Adam and Eve. After their fall from grace, our first parents experience themselves as separated from God, alienated from one another and struggling with nature. Once they are expelled from the garden they, and all their descendants are now out of sync with God, with one another and nature. We know that we were originally made to be one with God and each other and all creation. But humankind rejected this oneness. This is our original SIN. This is the SIN Jesus comes to take away. Jesus comes to bring unity to and peace.

We experience separation and division every day among the rich and poor; black and white, republicans and democrats, men and women, parents and children, church leaders and the faithful, business and labor. Division and alienation makes up the fabric of our lives. Yet Jesus’ mission is quite simple; he came to take away the original sin of division and disunity. He came to unite us in the Spirit with the Father. Then John goes on to tell us how Jesus was to fulfill his mission of bringing unity and peace. He will be “The Lamb of God”.

During Jesus lifetime Jewish people went to the temple in Jerusalem to sacrifice a lamb as a sin offering. In the Jewish custom, the ritual lamb sacrificed reestablish our broken relationship with God.

But now, with the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God, humankind would no longer need to offer year after year the sacrifice of the lamb for its sins. Now God had appeared in human flesh as the lamb who, by the sacrifice of his life, would permanently bond humanity with God by taking away our sin. BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD.

Like John, once we experience Jesus as the one who can unite us with God and one another, we want to shout it out. Behold! And that is exactly what John does in today's gospel. As he does, scripture tells us that Andrew hears him and immediately becomes a disciple of the Lord. Andrew's response is immediate. He goes and announces to his brother, Simon (Peter), about Jesus.

What does that have to do with us today! Does that mean that if we come to know Jesus as the one who takes away the sin and division of the world that we need to go and witness like John and Andrew did?

(pause)

John Shea, a well known theologian tells a story about a day when he was out sunning himself on the beach. Two young adults one in shirt

and tie and the other with a skirt and blouse, with their shoes in hand, came up to him and peered down at him through the bright sun and said, “Do you have personal relationship with Jesus?” Without missing a beat he said, “Unfortunately, I do”.

John Shea says that he does not always have a good grasp of all that Jesus said or did and he sometimes he has a hard time living it out. Yet he is drawn to Jesus and struggles to follow him. It makes him quite humble. But when we realize that even John the Baptist struggled to know who Christ was, Shea finds himself in good company. The challenge is: how could I develop a clear testimony about Jesus to others and yet be true to myself and my struggle to know and follow him?

Have you ever had that problem? How should you, how should I, witness to my belief in Jesus? What should I say?

John Shea was bothered about this. Once I come to experience the Good News that Jesus is truly the lamb of God who takes away the sin, the brokenness, feeling of alienation in our world, how can I in an honest way witness to that belief?

I think we all have to do some deep thinking about how we can effectively witness to others. The very purpose of being a member of

the Church is to bring the Good News of Jesus to the ends of the earth.

John Shea gives us a hint when he goes on to say that a student came up to him after a theology class and asked him if he believed in God. He did not know exactly how to answer him. He invited him back to his office in a week. When they met, he told the young man that his relationship with Jesus had developed as he read the gospels. The stories of Jesus had allowed him to bind his spirit with the Spirit of God.

Isn't "binding our spirit with the Spirit of God" another way of saying "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

May we experience the Lamb of God who sets our spirits free and may we, like John, the Baptist, find ways to humbly, boldly and honestly profess our discovery to all who await Good News.