

LOOK, THE LAMB OF GOD (Jn 1,29-34)

On the next day, John saw Jesus coming toward him, and so he said: "Behold, the Lamb of God. Behold, he who takes away the sin of the world. 30 This is the one about whom I said, 'After me arrives a man, who has been placed ahead of me, because he existed before me.' 31 And I did not know him. Yet it is for this reason that I come baptizing with water: so that he may be made manifest in Israel." 32 And John offered testimony, saying: "For I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove; and he remained upon him. 33 And I did not know him. But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me: 'He over whom you will see the Spirit descending and remaining upon him, this is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I saw, and I gave testimony: that this one is the Son of God."

There is a story about how missionaries had trouble translating the phrase "Behold, the Lamb of God" for a certain Eskimo tribe. Not only had the natives never seen a lamb, they didn't even have a word for it in their language. So the phrase was translated as "Behold, the seal of God." For the Eskimos, the seal—like the lamb for us—is a symbol of gentleness.

The Jews, on the other hand, understood the words "Behold, the Lamb of God" very well. For them, the lamb was a symbol of God's salvation and deliverance from sin. Another interesting development in the sentence with which John the Baptist introduces Jesus is "... who takes away the sin of the world." The phrase "the sins of the world" is not used here. For the evangelist John, there is only one true sin - and that is the rejection of the Light that came into this world to enlighten every man (Jn 1,9). He considers other sins to be merely manifestations of the rejection of God.

The evangelist John presents John the Baptist to us as a man who sought God with all his heart. He too confesses, "I did not know him" (Jn 1,31), but after recognizing Jesus as the Son of God, he gained inner certainty. It was a flash of light after a long walk through the night. The evangelist states that this happened "on the second day." (Jn 1,29) But how long must the "first day" have lasted for John? It is certain that in biblical language it is not a day that lasts twenty-four hours, but a period that symbolizes John's process of searching, questioning, and listening to God.

Because John walked this path, his cry of "Behold, the Lamb of God!" must have sounded powerful and convincing. He became a witness. So powerful that all of Israel came to him. Like John, we too need a "first day" to recognize Jesus as God and Lord of our lives. Only then can we become his credible witnesses.