

2nd SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – A (January 15, 2023)

How many of you parents have ever had this experience? You are busy at some task and your little one comes up and says “Mommy” or “Daddy”; you respond “yes, dear?” while staying busy at your task. The child is persistent and finally comes up to you, puts hands on your face so you are looking at each other face to face and says “Look at me!” He or she wants your full attention, and chances are, at that point, you will give that full attention!

This comes to mind with the gospel today where John the Baptist sees Jesus coming along and declares: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” “Behold”—the dictionary defines this as to perceive, to gaze upon. It’s more than just a brief glance or a half-hearted focus on something or someone; rather, it involves a deliberate act of giving full attention to the person or situation that comes up.

As we return to Ordinary Time, we are challenged to renew our own resolve to “behold” this Lamb of God “who takes away the sin of the world.” Back to that idea of having a personal, loving relationship with Jesus Christ: that is certainly something that he wants with and for us. You can’t really have a true, personal relationship with anyone (spouse, child, parent, friend) unless you really pay serious and sincere attention to them, unless you truly notice and behold them. How well and how sincerely do we look for and behold Jesus? No, we don’t have the privilege of seeing him in his earthly, bodily form as did John the Baptist and the others back then. But that does not mean that we are at any serious disadvantage compared to those others.

1. Consider, for example, the Eucharist. What does the priest say to the people right before they come forward to receive Holy Communion? He repeats almost word for word what John the Baptist said in the gospel: “Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world” (and then ‘...blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb’). What is on the altar and what you are to receive is no longer mere bread and wine—it is Jesus himself in the fullness of his Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. Are we truly aware that Jesus is truly present in our midst and that we can gaze upon him, look at him, behold his physical presence with our very eyes?

The fact that we can indeed visually behold Jesus in the Eucharist and receive him into our bodies and our very selves, means that we can not only see him—we can actually become one with him and he can become one with us. Holy Communion unites with Jesus in a way like no other. This is the main reason why being present for Mass, if at all possible, is so important. We hear people say they can worship and pray to God at home or in the beauty of nature. That is certainly true. But you can’t receive Jesus into your own body in Holy Communion unless you are here—it’s as simple as that. Our beautiful tradition and practice of Eucharistic adoration—praying in the presence of Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament on the altar—is another opportunity for us to behold that Lamb of God who takes away the world’s sins, and to experience his quiet grace and peace in a profoundly powerful way.

2. Elsewhere in John’s gospel we find other invitations to behold Jesus, but in a very different situation. In chapter 19 we read his account of Jesus’ passion including his meeting with Pontius Pilate. At one point, after having Jesus scourged and crowned with thorns, Pilate brought him

out and said to the crowd “Behold the man!”; later on, he said to the religious leaders “Behold your king!” Indeed, let us behold our Savior, let us look attentively at this God-man who endured horrific pain. Look upon a crucifix and behold Jesus nailed to a piece of wood...and be utterly astonished at this mystery of sacrificial love that goes way beyond the power of mere words to describe. We might well heed Pilate’s invitation: ”Behold the man!” Look upon the suffering Christ and realize that there is no suffering of any kind that we have ever endured or will endure that Jesus did not experience in his passion. Behold Jesus in his suffering...and know that you are never, ever alone in your suffering because Jesus has already been there and done that.

3. Finally we are called to behold and see Jesus in others. In chapter 25 of Matthew’s gospel Jesus speaks about the Last Judgment and how whatever we do (or don’t do) for others, we actually do (or don’t do) for him. Jesus is truly present in others; we can behold him in others. This is no mere pious platitude or ‘warm fuzzy’; Jesus never wasted his time with such things; he is about real world, flesh-and-blood truth—especially about himself and how he identifies himself totally with those in need. St.Teresa of Calcutta said she saw the face of Jesus in everyone she served—from the malnourished baby dying in her arms to those abandoned and dying in the streets and gutters of Calcutta and elsewhere.

In Clarence Enzler’s “Everyman’s Way of the Cross” he has a reflection on the 5th Station (Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus carry the cross) that is right on target: “Lord, make me realize that every time I wipe a dish, pick up an object off the floor, assist a child in some small task, or give another preference in traffic or the store; each time I feed the hungry, clothe the naked, teach the ignorant, or lend my hand in any way—it matters not to whom—my name is Simon. And the kindness I extend to them I really give to you.” Behold Jesus in everyone and do so intentionally...because he is there. Do so--even if the person is someone who annoys you, has hurt you, or that you just don’t like...because Jesus is in that person nonetheless. By the way, we might also ask ourselves as an examination of conscience: do others behold Jesus in me...or is he hidden because of my own sins or self-centeredness?

Again from John the Baptist in today’s gospel: “Behold the Lamb of God.” Behold him indeed—he is here and everywhere. Behold Jesus—look for him and look at him: in the Eucharist, on the crucifix, and in your neighbor (across the street or across the world). Seek him, and you will indeed behold and find him...and you will be transformed by him and become more like him. Desire Jesus—seek him out, and you will find him. And if you are hesitant to do so in that very direct way, why??