10 Homily for the Second Sunday of the Ordinary Time Year A

15 January 2017

Is 49:3, 5-6; 1 Cor 1:1-3; Jn 1:29-34

In one of St Anthony’s Shrines in Sri Lanka, behind the main Altar there were two words embossed in Gold Plated Letters: Priest Victim. As a young child going to this shrine with my mother, these words quite fascinated me and aroused a curiosity to know what they really meant. “The One, who knows more, loves more”: Saint Catherine of Siena. In later years as a seminarian these words became clear to me when I was engaged in theological studies and evoked a deep love for the Holy Eucharist. Both words Priest and Victim refer to one and the same person: Christ. Priest: Christ as the Perfect High Priest and Victim as the perfect unblemished sacrificial Lamb of God.

John introduces Jesus “Look there is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.” We say these words at every mass. Therefore it is very important that we understand these words. To understand this statement we need to look into the Old Testament Jewish Sacrificial System. At the Temple of Jerusalem, Jews sacrificed different animals in reparation for their sins. Among those animals, [Exodus 29:38-46](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Exodus%2029.38-46) describes how a year old lamb was sacrificed twice daily at the temple as an atonement for the sins of the people. Similarly, at the first Exodus, Moses advised the people of Israel to slay the Passover to apply its blood on the door post to protect them from the angel of death.

What is important is to see the parallels between the sacrifice of the Lamb at the Temple and the Sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary on the Cross. First Parallel, Moses commanded that the Paschal Lamb should be unblemished, spotless and a single bone should not be broken (Exodus 12:46). So the Gospel of John chapter 19 tells us as follows: “But when they came to Jesus and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs.” Second Parallel, Moses commanded the people of Israel to mark their door post with the blood of the Paschal lamb with a bunch of hyssop (Exodus 12:22). Once again the Gospel of John in chapter 19:29 tells us: “A jar full of sour wine was standing there. So they put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop and held it to his mouth.” Dear friends, though there are similarities in these sacrifices, also remember there are distinct differences in them. The Book of Hebrews 10:4 tells us that animal sacrifices were imperfect and were not efficacious enough to make atonement for the sins of mankind. So animal sacrifices had to be offered over and over again. At the same time, the high priest and other priests were too imperfect as they were guilty of their own sins. So they had to offer a separate sacrifice, a sin offering for their sins. On the contrary, the sacrifice of Jesus is the perfect sacrifice; the one who offers it and what is being offered is the sinless one. Jesus is the sinless perfect high priest and he is the sinless Unblemished Perfect Sacrificial Lamb, the perfect victim. Therefore, what Christ offered on the cross at Calvary is offered once and for all for the sins of all men and women in the past, the future and the present.

Dear Friends, each time as we gather around this Holy Altar, what we celebrate here is a commemoration of that perfect sacrifice offered by the perfect sinless high priest. Hence, let us become conscious of the meaning and the value of what we offer here on this altar and strive to become what we offer.

Today let me wind up this reflection with a poem about the Lamb of God by Roy Allen:

“Behold, The Lamb of God is passing by.”

“Follow Him,” was John the Baptist’s cry.

For He’ll take away all of this world’s sin

and open heaven’s door to let us in.

As a lamb to the slaughter He was led

pouring out His precious blood so red.

For only He could pay that awful price

and atone for sin by His sacrifice.

Stricken and smitten of His God was He

for my transgressions and iniquity.

There lash by lash my penalty He paid

when upon the altar the Lamb was laid.

Before heaven’s throne the Lamb of God stands

the wounds of the cross in His feet and hands.

There He intercedes and He pleads for me

This Lamb of God Who died to set me free.