

3 January 2025 - Friday

[1 Jn 29.3-6, Jn 1.29-34](#)

Homily

The Evangelist John does not recount the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist - an event that signals the beginning of Jesus' public ministry in the other Gospels - but he does dwell on John the Baptist's testimony.

It is a testimony addressed to no one in particular and therefore applies to all men and women of all times: 'John gave this testimony...'. John had already said to those who questioned him about the meaning of his baptism: 'There is one among those who follow me (that is, among my disciples) who is greater than I...'. So when the day came, he recognised him and said: 'Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world'. The title '*Lamb of God*' obviously refers to the lamb eaten each year during the Easter celebration, and, beyond this memorial, to the lamb whose blood had marked the lintel of the doors of the Jews in Egypt, during the night of the Flight, and had saved their first-born. The expression also referred to the lamb that was driven each year into the desert, symbolically burdened by the priest with all the sins of the people.

But what does John the Baptist mean by the expression 'the sin of the world'? He did not say 'the sins of the world', but 'the sin of the world'. What sin are we talking about? To translate by reversing the words, for example by saying: 'who takes away the sin of the world' would be a misinterpretation. 'tèn hamartían tou kósmou' really means "the sin of the world" and, in a way, "the sin of the world par excellence". And first of all, which world are we talking about? Obviously the world that the Prologue to John's Gospel has just spoken about: 'He was in the world and the world was made through him, and the world did not recognise him'.

The 'sin of the world' is not this or that transgression, or even all transgressions. Rather, it is the world of men as a whole insofar as it does not receive the message of Christ and does not allow itself to be transformed by it. The 'sin of the world' is the fact that our world, the world in which we live, is not structured according to the Gospel. The sin of the world is that the poor and the little ones are crushed, that so many men and women suffer from hunger, that so many people are driven from their homes and countries by war, that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, that so many sick people die for lack of medicines while astronomical sums are spent on developing machines of death. The sin of the world is the existence of wars,

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abortion and the death penalty. It is the violation of all the rights of individuals and peoples. The sin of the world is also the guilty silence and inaction in the face of all these injustices and crimes.

It is from this sin that the Lamb of God, recognised by John, came to deliver the world. And yet, after two thousand years, the world is still in its sin. We are all *in* this world, but it is possible for each and every one of us not to be *of* this world. How can we do this? By receiving the Son of God, by accepting his message, by allowing ourselves to be transformed by him: 'To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the power to become children of God'.

John the Baptist knew how to recognise the one who was coming to free the world from its sin, because his heart was pure. He saw the Holy Spirit descend on the head of Jesus, and shortly afterwards he had his own head cut off. Let's ask God for the clarity to recognise both the sin in the world (in us and around us) and the One who delivers us from it, even when this clarity can be dangerous and fraught with consequences.

Armand Veilleux