

2 Sunday Ordinary Time, Year A

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

When we try to think about God – who he is, what he is, and what he is like, almost every time, our minds move in the direction of might and power. We see him as the great God of the universe, the creator of all things. He is so big, and we are so small. It is natural, I suppose, that our initial impression of him would be power.

And that concept is valid. When we consider the extent of our universe, we cannot help but wonder about the Power that brought it into being and holds it together. But if we stop here, we will miss some of the most profound truths about God.

In today's gospel reading, John the Baptist pointed at Jesus and called him **"the Lamb of God."** Then later he said, **"I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from the sky, and it came to rest on him."** The New Testament makes it clear that Jesus is the revelation of God. If we want to know what God is like, we have only to look at Jesus. Once he said to his disciples, **"Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."** And here in today's gospel reading, this one who is the revelation of God is compared to a lamb and a dove.

To get the full picture, we need to recall our use of animal symbolism. For many centuries, men have compared themselves with animals to say what they believe about themselves. American Indians

named their sons after the wolf, the bear, and the other strong and courageous beasts.

Today's most common use of such symbols is seen in connection with athletic teams. The National Football League is a classic example here in the United States. Think of the names and the mascots of some teams: the Bears, the Lions, the Rams, the Panthers, the Eagles, the Falcons, the Seahawks, or the Broncos.

All of these names are intended to describe what each team wants to believe about itself and what it wants others to believe about it. Every symbol relates to strength, courage, or both.

That is how it is with us humans. We like to stretch our muscles and show the rest of the world how strong we are. We even do it on a national level. The symbol of the United States is the bald eagle. The symbol of China is a dragon. All of this means that we are strong nations, and we want to be certain the rest of the world knows about it.

Now, come back to our gospel reading. Here is Jesus, the revelation of God. To see him is to see the Father. And what are the symbols with which he is described? A lamb and a dove. Can you imagine that? Can you picture an athletic team calling itself the lambs or the doves?

That is completely unthinkable. We are too impressed with bigness and power. We could never compare ourselves with a lamb or a dove.

This gospel reading is telling us something about God that we need to learn. It speaks to me of his gentleness. What else could a lamb and a dove represent?

Here is an aspect of the nature of God that most of us seldom, if ever, consider. In our obsession with his power, we forget that he is strong enough to be gentle. Sure, he created the world, but look at that world under a microscope, and you will see that it is a very delicate instrument. He made the mighty oceans, of course, he did, but he also made the tiny dew drops that form on the grass early in the morning. He made huge redwood trees that may grow to heights over 300 feet, but he also made flowers so delicate that they will wither at the touch of a finger. He made the giant condor, which may have a wingspan of up to eleven feet, and the tiny hummingbird, which, when fully grown, may be less than two inches long.

The common analogy of God in the Bible is that of a father. Many can associate that with gentleness. Some cannot because they never had a father who was strong enough to be gentle. But did you know that God is compared with a mother at least once in the Bible? You will find it in Isaiah. There, the Lord is quoted as saying, **“As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you.”**

What a beautiful picture that is. Most of us have experienced it; all of us have seen it. A child is hurt, frightened, or tired; so, his mother takes him in her arms, holds him close, whispers words of love, and all is well.

That is a concept of God that seems almost foreign to us. It may even seem like sacrilege.

My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

We see God as power, but maybe we need to take one more look, this time through the eyes of John the Baptist. That old prophet looked at Jesus and saw a lamb and a dove. I don't know what it all means, but surely he must have been telling us about the gentleness of God. **Amen.**