

## Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

John the Baptist saw Jesus coming toward him and said:  
“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the  
world.”  
John 1, 29-34



I don't know if you ever read the comic strip *Doonesbury*. Its creator is Garry Trudeau, a graduate of Yale University, who uses the comic strip to comment on social and political life in the United States. The comic strip is syndicated to a few newspapers in Australia. There have been some occasions when newspaper editors have pulled the strip from publication because they regarded it as not politically correct. That happened when Trudeau lampooned President Clinton for his sexual misdemeanours. One of his more controversial strips appeared in 2001 when he featured a report from the fictional “Lovenstein Institute” stating that President George W. Bush had the lowest IQ (91) of any U.S. President in the previous fifty years. It drew howls of protest from readers around the country. Trudeau apologized for his insensitivity to “all those people who believe the President is intelligent.” The point of all this is merely to say that Trudeau and many of his fellow cartoonists and comic strip writers are blessed with very acute powers of observation. Incidentally, when Trudeau was still an undergraduate, attending drawing classes, he was singled out one day by his professor who came to inspect what Trudeau was drawing. The professor took one look, reached out and ripped the drawing from Trudeau's board and tore it into small pieces in front of the class. He then turned to his embarrassed student and said: “Yes, I know you can draw. What I'd really like to know is whether you can *see*.”

The professor's challenge to Trudeau is the very challenge that John the Baptist put to his audience (and to us) in today's gospel reading. We are challenged to be sharp observers and acute listeners.

We're so used to saying, reading and hearing the expression “Lamb of God” in its application to Jesus that it has almost lost its meaning. Yet, at a time when the Jewish people were waiting and hoping for a Messiah who would sweep in and rid Israel of foreign invaders, the term *Lamb* of God would hardly have been music to their ears. They were probably hoping for someone more like a lion than a lamb. However, John not only attributes to Jesus a title that looks and sounds a little anaemic, but he provides a role description of enormous proportions: one who will “take away the sin of the world.” The Baptist goes on to admit that his expectations were such that he, too, initially failed to recognize Jesus as “God's chosen one”.

Throughout human history, there's been no shortage of evil in our world - and all kinds of failed and frustrated efforts to rid us of that evil. Even now in Australia, there is a campaign to protect us from the evil of gaming machines. Governments across the years have tried to protect people from the evils of alcohol, and communities from child abuse. Communism was designed to lift up the poor and starving and to create all men and women as equal. Yet those who set about implementing it ended up getting rich at the expense of those whose rights they came to champion. Somehow, power and self-interest seem to end up seducing those who set out to rid the world of the evils they identify. All human attempts to rid the world of sin and evil have been dismal failures. Still, John the Baptist says categorically

that Jesus, the Lamb of God, will take away all the sin and evil in the world. Moreover, he calls us to look very carefully at this *Lamb* of God and to take in the enormity of what he is saying about Jesus.

The fact that he uses the title of *Lamb* indicates that Jesus will confront and conquer sin and evil through non-violence. John urges us to look, listen and take notice. The One he points to will really make a difference. He is the one who will eventually go silently to his murderers. However, before that happens, he will exhort us to “turn the other cheek”, “to pray for our enemies”, and “to go the extra mile, giving to anyone who asks for a shirt, a coat as well. This is the *Lamb* who refuses to call down fire on the Samaritans who do not welcome him, who refuses to condemn the woman caught in adultery, who urges us to spend our lives for our friends, who appeals to us to “learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart”.

Inspired by God’s Spirit, John came to the realization that Jesus would triumph over sin and violence and evil by preaching and living a way of peace.

Today’s gospel appeals to us to recognize this *Lamb* of God in our midst and to take a leaf from his book. John witnessed to the peace and love and compassion of God as he went about baptizing and preaching repentance. Jesus witnessed to those very things in his preaching and teaching and dying. Our witness can be declared in less vocal, but still effective, ways through our unflagging compassion for those in distress, through our uncompromising moral convictions and through the enthusiasm and purpose we bring to all we do as we strive to bring the Gospel to life’s challenges.