

This Sunday the Church returns to the season of Ordinary Time, and our Scripture readings, I think, point to a basic question of Christian spirituality and faith: How do we know Jesus? In our second reading from 1 Corinthians, St. Paul introduces himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God.” We know the story of Paul’s encounter with Christ, blinded by a bright light on his way to Damascus (Acts 9), and his subsequent conversion to be a great apostle going far and wide to proclaim the Good News. In our Gospel reading from John, John the Baptist tells the people, “I did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, ‘On whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, he is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.’” John the Baptist knows Jesus by seeing the Spirit descending upon Him.

We may not know Jesus by such dramatic means, but we do know Him by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:3). We know Jesus by the Word, the Scriptures. We know Jesus by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, as we receive Jesus’ Body and Blood poured out for us. We know Jesus by the testimony of others, as the people did who listened to John the Baptist, or the ones who listened to Paul and the other Apostles. And we know Jesus by experience. As we reflect on the Gospel accounts and on the events in our own lives, we are able to make connections between our lives and His. As we carry our own crosses, we can better appreciate the Cross He carried for us.

I think it is important to reflect on knowing Jesus in the context of the Cross. In the beginning of our Gospel passage, John the Baptist sees Jesus coming, and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” What does it mean to know Jesus as the “Lamb of God?” For me, it means getting different ideas about power, love, and life. God showed His power not through domination or wealth or violence, but through sacrifice. We are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb! When we reflect on Jesus’ sacrifice, we see that love is not just some warm, “fuzzy” feeling, but a choice to give of oneself to others. And when we remember that Jesus’ death on the Cross for the forgiveness of our sins was followed by His resurrection on Easter day, we realize that in order to be fully alive, we need to die to ourselves, to our self-seeking and self-centeredness.

Another question that follows “How do we know Jesus?” is “How do we make Him known?” For to know Jesus leads to proclaiming the Good News about Him. We may not be able to talk about Jesus in the same way that John the Baptist or St. Paul did, but we are called nonetheless, to testify to Him somehow. Our most eloquent testimony, though, will probably not come from any words we speak, but from the lives we lead. As we follow the Lamb of God in love and sacrifice, we testify to a wisdom different than that of the world. We testify to the reality of God’s love for His people. We testify to the reasonableness of faith, and a rationale for hope. And we respond to the need for peace and justice. Just as we have learned from the testimony of others, so are we called to offer our own witness to the world.

May God continue to bless us all. May we come to know Jesus more deeply, and follow Him more closely.

In Christ,

Fr. Phil, CP