First Reading - Is 49:3. 5-6

I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

The Lord said to me, ‘You are my servant, Israel, in whom I shall be glorified’; I was honoured in the eyes of the Lord, my God was my strength. And now the Lord has spoken, he who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, to gather Israel to him:

‘It is not enough for you to be my servant, to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the survivors of Israel; I will make you the light of the nations so that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.’

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 39:2. 4. 7-10. R. vv.8. 9. (R.) Here I am, Lord; I come to do your will.

Second Reading - 1 Cor 1:1-3

The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

I, Paul, appointed by God to be an apostle, together with brother Sosthenes, send greetings to the church of God in Corinth, to the holy people of Jesus Christ, who are called to take their place among all the saints everywhere who pray to our Lord Jesus Christ; for he is their Lord no less than ours. May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ send you grace and peace.

Gospel Acclamation

Jn 1:14. 12 Aleluia, aleluia!
The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. He enabled those who accepted him to become the children of God. Alleluia!

**Gospel - Jn 1:29-34**

This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Seeing Jesus coming towards him, John said, ‘Look, there is the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. This is the one I spoke of when I said: A man is coming after me who ranks before me because he existed before me. I did not know him myself, and yet it was to reveal him to Israel that I came baptising with water.’ John also declared, ‘I saw the Spirit coming down on him from heaven like a dove and resting on him. I did not know him myself, but he who sent me to baptise with water had said to me, “The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and rest is the one who is going to baptise with the Holy Spirit.” Yes, I have seen and I am the witness that he is the Chosen One of God.’

**Gospel Reflection:**

To provide a reference for someone is a serious responsibility as well as a privilege because, more often than not, a good deal depends on the testimony provided in the reference. John the Baptist took it upon himself to provide a reference for Jesus. His testimony reverberates across the centuries, offering an introduction to Jesus for those who seek to understand this Jewish prophet and teacher who is more than a prophet or teacher. John wants his disciples to understand that the whole purpose of his water baptism is that Jesus “might be revealed”. He wants them to know that Jesus is “of God”. He is the “lamb of God”, the “chosen one of God”. He is the one on whom God’s Spirit descends and remains. Jesus comes before the Baptist and so ranks before him.

Is the author of this gospel using the character of the Baptist as a vehicle for his particular Christology or presentation of Jesus? That’s what many scholars think, although some of the images in the Baptist’s testimony are firmly grounded in Jewish tradition and could well come from a prophetic figure like John the Baptist. Maybe the answer to the question is “yes, but not exclusively”.

Whether the images have their origin with John the Baptist or with John the gospel writer, we might reasonably wonder what it means to say that Jesus is “God’s lamb”. Does the expression refer to the Passover lamb whose blood signifies liberation or deliverance? The imagery in John’s gospel in relation to the death of Jesus might point in this direction. Is “God’s lamb” the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 who assumes the sins of the many? Is it an image of the lamb that God provides for Abraham’s sacrifice in Genesis 22? Is it
evoking the apocalyptic lamb of Jewish literature of the time, the powerful conquering lamb that destroys evil in the world? Is it intended to suggest vulnerability as in the prophecy of Jeremiah 11:19 ("I was like a gentle lamb led to the slaughter").

There is never a simple explanation when it comes to John’s gospel, but it seems to me that the symbol of strength in vulnerability has potential for understanding the characterization of Jesus in this gospel. The Lamb of God of John 1:29 “takes away” the sinful condition of the world. Twenty-one centuries down the track there is still violence and hunger and exploitation on a massive scale. The work of the one strong enough to risk vulnerability so that others may have life, the work of God’s Lamb, is never done. Witness to that is part of the gift that Pope Francis is offering to the world: despite opposition, even among those closest to him, he never wavers in his response to the distress of God’s people and the distress of God’s Earth.

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