

6 Sun Easter Yr B 17-18

Interesting that the Royal Commission into the Banks has brought up the idea of a scapegoat. Just look at who has been asked the questions. These witnesses, many are women, are not the male top heavies of the companies, rather they are involved further down the management structure, scapegoats if you like.

Scapegoat means that someone will take the blame when things go wrong. Someone is made to be the fall guy or doll or scapegoat; someone will be blamed and driven out from their job or position.

This is a very old pre-Christian practice. At regular intervals a community would rid itself of all its wrongs (the rivalries, divisions, jealousies, violence, theft, anger and so on). These problems would be symbolically loaded onto the back of a goat which is then driven out into the wilderness, thus taking away the sins of the community.

And of course this worked for awhile, but human freedom being what it is, rivalries, divisions, jealousies and the like soon creep back. Nothing has really changed at all. That is the at the back of everyone's mind with the Royal Commission, the Banks will simply sail happily away on the copious tears of Directors.

We have just heard from the first letter of John where he writes that God '... sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.' 1Jn 4:10

In the Eucharistic Prayer I will shortly say,
Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away the sins of the world.

Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
Have you ever asked yourself: "How does Jesus take away the sins of the world?" If we are no careful we can get the answer terribly wrong.

It is wrong to think that God has been angry with everyone since Adam ruined the garden of paradise, or that Jesus was paying back a debt to God; that God took Jesus' death as some sort of compensation for our sins.

Jesus can be said to be a scapegoat, but not like the Jewish, Old Testament goat. He doesn't somehow take away what goes wrong by carrying it off so that our wrongs or bad choices are no longer present with us.

Jesus carried a wooden cross which was heavy. The sins of all those who condemned him to death were not loaded onto it, simply to be carried away and forgotten. So how does Jesus take away the sins of the world?

There is a moving Gospel story when Jesus steps in between a woman about to be stoned and those about to stone her. He holds this awful moment, he holds the tension between the accused and the accusers. He holds the fear and injustice and changes it into peace on the one hand and shame on the other.

Amidst our wrong choices, the hurt and damage to others, and also they to us, we need to invite Jesus to stand between our wrong doing and our victim. Let him take our sin in, hold it and change it. The crucifixion on the cross is a prime example where love and forgiveness changed the hate and injustice that brought it about. Simply put,

Jesus took away the sin of the community by taking in hatred and giving back love; by taking in anger and giving out graciousness; by taking in envy and giving back blessing; by taking in bitterness and giving out warmth; by taking in pettiness and giving back compassion; by taking in chaos and giving back peace and by taking in sin and giving back forgiveness¹.

¹ Roland Rolheiser, *How Jesus takes away sin*, London: The Catholic Herald, 28 May 1999.

Let's not kid ourselves that this is easy to do. More often than not we naturally want to give back in kind; Hatred for hatred, anger for anger, coldness for coldness, revenge for hurt.

There can be no reconciliation with anyone, if this is our attitude. And, we are too impatient to wait for Divine Judgment. What was the punchline of that old TV comedy, *You'll get yours Alice!*

You can see then how sin stays in families and in communities, it won't go away; what should be a friendly land becomes a no man's land. No amount of blame or scapegoating can take away our sins, our wrong choices, our hurts, because nothing has changed, because no one is prepared to change.

The only way all this excess and useless baggage can leave our families or communities is for someone to take it, hold it, carry it and through a sacrifice of self, change hatred, anger, betrayal, pettiness, bitterness and resentment into something else. As Jesus says;

This is my commandment: that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. Jn 15:12-13

The cross is the symbol of self-sacrificing love. In the Old Testament a lamb was the sacrifice which not only fed the people before the Exodus journey, but whose blood signaled those who Moses would lead from slavery and oppression to freedom and service in the Promised Land.

In the Mass, Jesus, THE Lamb of God, feeds us with his Body and Blood, as his friends. Friends, eat together, share life stories together; seek each other's reassurance and encouragement. This meal strengthens us to give back to others love, graciousness, blessing, compassion, warmth and forgiveness. Holy Communion is meant to change us.