

2nd Sunday in Ordinary time, January 14, 2018

In the city of Werden, Germany, there stands a Catholic Church with a lamb carved out of stone and placed on its roof. It was said that when the Church was being built, a stone-carving mason fell from a high scaffold. His co-workers rushed down, expecting to find him dead. But to their surprise and joy, he was alive and only slightly injured. How did he survive? A flock of sheep was passing beneath the tower at that time, and he landed on top of a lamb. The lamb broke his fall and was crushed to death, but the man was saved. To commemorate that miraculous escape, he carved a lamb in stone and placed it on the tower, in gratitude for the lamb that saved his life. Today we are here at this Liturgy to remember and salute another Lamb who died a cruel death to save mankind. In today's Gospel, John the Baptist introduces Jesus as the "Lamb of God, which takes away the sin of the world."

Today's readings remind us of our personal call to become witnesses for the Lamb of God and to lead lives of holiness and purity. The first reading describes how Yahweh called Samuel to His service. The book of Samuel begins with a long narrative of what we might call ancient Israel's middle history. Moses, Aaron, and Joshua were gone from the scene. The period of rule by Judges had begun (at about 1000 BC). The first chapter describes how Samuel was born to a long-barren couple by Divine intervention. They dedicated him in his early childhood to God's service in the Temple at Shiloh, as an apprentice to the priest Eli. The boy's duties included attendance during the night near "the Ark of God," a place of unique Divine presence among the people.

God called Samuel one night and Samuel thought it was his master Eli. Twice God called, twice Samuel went to Eli and twice Eli told him to go back to sleep. The third time God called and Samuel went to Eli, the old priest realized what was going on, and told Samuel, "Next time, say, 'Speak, Lord, Your servant is listening.'" The threefold repetition of God's call indicates genuine experience rather than hallucination. Eli knew the proper response for all God's followers: "Speak, Lord, for Your servant is

listening." Only those willing to carry out the Lord's wishes will be able to hear God calling -- even in the middle of the night. Though Eli had served God faithfully, it was Samuel whom God called. Samuel became an illustrious figure, ranking with Moses and David as a man of God. The lesson for us is that God often calls ordinary people, including the young, to serve within the community. Consequently, we all need guidance in discerning and responding to His will. Our lives as God's followers revolve around seeking, finding and responding to God's calls. Listening to the call of God is to hear, understand, and accept it in word and action. The questions we need to ask ourselves constantly are. Is God calling me today for a special mission? What is He saying to me? Am I really listening?

John's Gospel presents John the Baptist as a person, whose role is prominently one of witnessing. Instead of building up his own following, John selflessly directed his disciples to Jesus. John the Baptist gave testimony to Jesus by pointing Him out as the Lamb of God (vv 29, 36); Andrew called him the Messiah (v 41), and Nathaniel called Jesus Rabbi, Son of God, and King of Israel (v 49). Jesus completed the epiphany, declaring Himself the Son of Man (v 51). In the Synoptic gospels, Jesus called the disciples away from their fishing boats to follow him (Matt 4:18-22, et al.). But in the Fourth Gospel, they went to Him at John's direction rather than in response to Jesus' call. Instead of leaving their boats, they left John. On the second day of Jesus' public ministry, John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the Jews as the "Lamb of God." (Jn 1:29). He repeated the name on the third day in introducing Jesus to two of his own disciples as described in today's Gospel.

"Lamb of God" is the most meaningful title given to Jesus in the Bible. It is used 29 times in the book of Revelation. It sums up the love, the sacrifice and the triumph of Christ. In the Eucharist, at "the breaking of the bread," we proclaim what the Baptist said, in word or song, the Agnus Dei – "Lamb of God, who take away the sin of the world, have mercy on us/grant us peace." In this prayer, we give expression to our deepest understanding of the identity and purpose of Jesus Christ as our Lamb and Lord. Because of his life of love and sacrifice, we believe and affirm that he is the one who

came and continues to come into a broken world to take our sins upon himself.

In the opening verses of today's Gospel, John points out to his disciples that the One who is passing by is the "Lamb of God." Two of John's disciples follow Jesus who turns and asks them what they are seeking. Somewhat confused, they ask Jesus where he is staying. Jesus does not tell them. Instead, he invites them to "come and see." For each of us, belief in Jesus develops in stages, which John appears to be describing. First, we respond to testimony given by others. Then, having "seen" where Jesus dwells - within believers, as individuals and as community - we move to commitment based on our own experience of the risen Lord. Finally, our conversion is completed when we become witnesses for Jesus. In Andrew's case, his conversion reveals his belief in Jesus as the Messiah. He then brings his brother Peter to Christ. Jesus looks at Simon and says, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called 'Cephas' or 'Peter.'" Cephas is the Aramaic word for "rock" while the Greek word for rock is "Petros." This kind of name-change has precedents in the Old Testament (Gn 17:5, 32:28). Such name-changes indicate the beginning of a new life—a new purpose—a new relationship with God. Simon's new life in Christ is symbolized by his new name, "Peter," conferred by the Master. The evangelist sets out a challenging pattern for evangelization. The first people to be evangelized preached Jesus in their turn to relatives, friends, and even to strangers. We, too, must find and grow in Faith through our grace-assisted lifelong seeking of God's will, as we come to God through Jesus, whom we find in the local Christian community.

Our Christian vocation is to live and die like the Lamb of God. (A) We live like the Lamb of God: 1) by leading pure, innocent, humble, selfless lives, obeying Christ's commandment of love; 2) by appreciating the loving providence and protecting care of the Good Shepherd in his Church; 3) by partaking of the Body and Blood of the Good Shepherd in the Holy Eucharist and deriving spiritual strength from the Holy Spirit through prayer and the Sacraments. (B) We are called to die like the Lamb of God: a) by sharing sacrificially our blessings of health, wealth and talents with others

in the family, parish and community; b) by bearing witness to Christ in our illness, pain and suffering through our graceful acceptance of all of it; c) by offering our sufferings for God's glory, as penance for our sins and for the conversion of sinners.