

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary time- John 1:29-34

In the city of Werden, in Germany, there stands a Catholic Church with a lamb carved out of stone and placed on its roof. Centuries ago a worker was once up on the roof of that church in order to repair it. His safety belt snapped and he fell. The area below was filled with large-size rocks. As luck would have it, a lamb was having its lunch on grass growing between the rocks. The craftsman fell on the poor lamb. The lamb was slain... but the man survived. So the craftsman did the decent thing. He sculpted a lamb and, in gratitude, situated it on the roof. Today we come together at this Liturgy to remember and salute another Lamb. Each of us owes Him much. As a matter of fact, we owe Him our spiritual lives because he saved us from the eternally fatal fall from grace.

The central theme of today's readings is a challenge to live like the Lamb of God and to die like the Lamb of God. In both the first and second readings, God calls individuals to his service. The gospel passage presents three themes, namely, John's witness to Jesus, Jesus' epiphany and identification as the "Lamb of God," and the call to discipleship.

People called Jesus by different names: the Son of God, Rabbi, Messiah King of Israel, Son of Man, The "Lamb of God." John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the Jews as the "Lamb of God". 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, sacrifice and the triumph of Christ. John's introduction probably brought five pictures of the "lamb" to the minds of his Jewish listeners.

1) The Lamb of Atonement (Lev. 16: 20-22). A lamb was brought to the Temple on the Day of Atonement. Placing his hands over its head, the high priest

transferred all the sins of his people on it. It was then sent into the forest to be killed by some wild animal.

2) The Lamb of Daily Atonement (Ex. 29: 38-42; Numbers 28: 1-8). This was the lamb sacrificed on the “Black Altar” of the Temple every morning and evening to atone for the sins of the Jews.

3) The Paschal Lamb (Ex. 12: 11ss.). This was the lamb whose blood saved the first born of the Jewish families in Egypt from the ‘Angel of destruction.’ The Jews commemorate this event every year on the Passover Feast.

4) The Lamb of the Prophets. The prophets portrayed one lamb who, by his sacrifice, would redeem his people: “The gentle lamb led to the slaughter house” (Jer. 11: 19), “like a lamb to the slaughter” (Is 53:7). Both refer to the sufferings and sacrifice of Christ.

5) The Lamb of the Conquerors. This was the image of the horned lamb on the Jewish flag at the time of Maccabean liberation war, used as a sign of conquering majesty and power. The great Jewish conquerors like Samuel, David and Solomon were described by the ancient Jewish historians as “horned lambs.”

Christ as Lamb of God is a title familiar to us. In the Eucharist, at "the breaking of the bread" we proclaim what the Baptist said in word or song. Our traditional fraction anthem is the Agnus Dei – “Lamb of God, who takes 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. By 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.

Life messages: 1) Live and die like the Lamb of God. (A) Live like a lamb: i) by leading pure, innocent, humble, selfless lives obeying the Christ's commandment of love. ii) by appreciating the loving providence and protecting care of the Good Shepherd in his Church. iii) by eating the body and drinking the blood of the Good Shepherd and deriving spiritual strength from his Holy Spirit through sacraments and prayers. (B) Die like a sacrificial lamb: i) by sharing our blessings of health, wealth and talents with others in the family, parish and community. ii) by bearing witness to Christ in our illness, pain and suffering. iii) by offering our suffering for the salvation of souls and as reparation for our sins and those of others.

2) Rebuild broken lives. Like the missionary call of the servant in Isaiah (Isaiah 49:1-3) and "those called to be saints" in St. Paul's First Letter to the Church in Corinth (1 Corinthians 2:ff), we are informed that God's call is trustworthy and true. Therefore we can believe from the depth of our hearts that our God is faithful. And our faithful response to God is to rebuild broken lives, reconciling them to God's love and justice through Christ Jesus our Lamb and Lord. Through baptism into the Body of Christ we are empowered and enabled by the Holy Spirit to build up the oppressed. Through the love of the Lamb of God, we are called to better the lot, improving the broken spirit of all who have been exiled from the possibility of hope, exiled from God's righteousness, burdened by the yoke of spiritual, social, economic, and political dislocation. In other words, through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the glorified Lamb, we are called to empower the human spirit with a sense of identity and purpose.

3) Be a witness to the Lamb of God. Today's Gospel reminds us that being a disciple of Jesus means that we grow by faith to become witnesses for him. And witnessing to Christ is an active, not passive, lifetime enterprise. One cannot be a disciple of Jesus at a distance any more than one can be a distant lover. To love

Christ is to be drawn close to him, to know Christ personally, to experience him through the Bible, through prayers and sacraments, and to inspire others to want to know him. To help Christ is to share the Good News about him with others. Blessed are we when we bring to others the gifts of love, peace, justice, tolerance, and mercy, thus becoming witnesses for the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ our Lord.

4) "Come and see". The essence of our witness-bearing is to state what we have seen and believed and then to invite others to "come and see." For John, faith began by responding to the invitation to "come and see." Three times Andrew brought someone to Jesus -- first, his brother, Simon (1:40), then, a boy with five barley loaves and two fish (6:8); and finally, "some Greeks" (12:20-22), which signaled the hour for the Son of Man to be glorified. We tell others about good restaurants, barbers, optometrists, etc. Why isn't there the same fervor over inviting and encouraging people to come and participate in our church activities? Often we hesitate to do so because of the false notion that talking about religion is taboo in our culture, or that religion is a private matter and shouldn't be shared with others, or that we don't have much of a personal faith to share, or that our worship services would not be appealing to others. One of the differences that faith should make in our lives is the desire that others -- especially those without a religious faith -- might also share in and benefit from the relationship God offers through Christ. If we are not willing to invite others into this experience, what does that say about our experiences with Christ and with our church?