

Homily

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time - Gospel John 1: 35-42

Fr. Antony James

The main theme of today's Scripture readings is Divine Call – that everyone is called by God to be a witness for Christ by doing something for others with his or her life, using his or her unique gifts and blessings. The first reading describes how Yahweh called Samuel to His service and how the boy Samuel responded to Him, saying, “*Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.*” In the Responsorial Psalm (Ps 40), the psalmist sings, “*Behold, I come to do Your will,*” indicating that his vocation is to obey, to do what God commands him to do. In the second reading, St. Paul explains to the Corinthians that their Divine call is a call to holiness. Our Christian call is to live and die like the *Lamb of God*.

The 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. John's introduction might have 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 (“Yom Kippur”). Placing his hands over its head, the high priest transferred all the sins of his people to the lamb. It was then sent into the wilderness (*as the lamb who takes away the sins of the Jews*) to be killed by some wild animal. 2) The Lamb of Daily Atonement (Ex

29:38-42; Nm 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.). The Paschal Lamb’s blood saved the firstborn of the Jewish families in Egypt from the “Angel of destruction.” The event was memorialized yearly in the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb at Passover. 4) The Lamb of the Prophets, an image portraying One Who, by dying a sacrificial death, would redeem God’s people: “The gentle lamb led to the slaughterhouse” (Jer 11:19), “like a lamb to the slaughter” (Is 53:7). Both, as we know, refer to the sufferings and sacrificial death of Christ. 5) The Lamb of the Conquerors. The picture of a horned lamb on the Jewish flag at the time of the Maccabaeen Liberation War was 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.”

Addressing Christ as Lamb of God has become familiar to us in the Eucharist, when, at “the breaking of the bread,” we proclaim our traditional “fractional anthem” three times in word or song what the Baptist said: “*Lamb of God, Who takes away the sin of the world, ... have mercy on us (twice) ...grant us peace (once).*” In this prayer, we give expression to our deepest understanding of the identity and purpose of Jesus Christ in coming to earth as the Messiah of God. He has come to be both our Lamb and our Lord. Because Jesus lived out his life on earth as one of humility, obedience to His Father, love, and sacrifice, we believe and affirm that Jesus is the One Who came and

continues to come into a broken world to take our sins upon himself in the Holy Mass. We are called to 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 for 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. 2) Our call is to bear witness to the *Lamb of God*. Doing this requires a personal experience of Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We get this personal experience of Jesus in our daily lives through the meditative reading and study of the Bible, through personal and family prayers, and through our active participation in the Eucharistic celebration. Once we have experienced the personal presence of Jesus in our daily lives, we will start sharing with others the *Good News* of love, peace, justice, tolerance, mercy, and forgiveness preached and lived by Jesus. Amen