



Dear Parishioners,

So much of agriculture these days has been taken over by agribusiness. Family farms are being threatened and it is more and more difficult for the small farmer to compete with huge corporate farming enterprises. In spite of this shift in size and ownership of farms, farming still evokes in our minds and our hearts images of lush fields, tidy gardens behind the farmhouse, and animals so well known by the owners that they are given names. Daisy Duck is a beloved Disney cartoon character. Betsy is a common cow's name. For those of you who remember, Shari Lewis' puppet Lamb Chop entertained children on TV for many years. A bit of trivia for you ... lambs are mentioned over two hundred (200) times in the Bible. Shepherding was a common livelihood for the nomadic people of biblical times. They were used for their wool and their meat. They were a staple of life. They were valuable and prized possessions, and so were also used in religious sacrifice. The Gospel this weekend names a very unique Lamb ... the "*Lamb of God.*" Lambs sacrificed for God are replaced by the "*Lamb of God,*" a human-divine person whose sacrifice is once and for all.

This weekend's Gospel opens with the words, "*John was standing with two of his disciples.*" These two disciples would have interpreted John the Baptist's cry, "*Behold, the Lamb of God,*" within the Passover and the Temple tradition of sacrifice of lambs. What is startling about John's cry is that he uses this sacrificial reference, not for a lamb, an animal, but for a human being who was walking by – Jesus. John the Baptist is pointing to Jesus as the One who will be sacrificed. Little did they know at this point that the core of following Jesus is sacrifice – is total self-giving. Still, they followed Him. As with all disciples, it took a time of rubbing shoulders with Jesus, hearing Him teach and preach, observing His interactions with people, observing Him pray, experiencing His determination about His mission, for them to begin to know Jesus, grasp His mission, and absorb the strength and courage to live His total self-giving life. Growing in total self-giving takes a lot of time.

Self-giving is absolutely essential for anyone who claims to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. None of us would choose the sacrifice that following Jesus requires. We are able to follow Jesus' example of total self-sacrifice only when we "**Behold**" Him ... when we keep our eyes focused on Him and His Good News of salvation. We need to "stay" with Jesus, abide with Him, and never be parted from Him in order for our self-giving to grow toward His total self-giving.

We cannot be truly disciples of Jesus Christ unless we, too, hear God's call and respond by transforming our lives as evidenced in the simple willingness to be obedient to God's will and to take up the saving mission of Christ. This means more than keeping commandments or even simply going to Mass on Sunday. It means that our whole lives are directed to being faithful in our allegiance to Christ and identifying with Him so completely that His life is ours, His mission is ours, and His total self-giving is ours.

Identifying with Jesus Christ and continuing His self-giving work of salvation make demands on us. Like Andrew in the Gospel, we must boldly announce the presence of Christ in our midst and bring others to Jesus. We do this best by living as He did ... caring for others, bringing a healing touch, or working at developing a deeper relationship with Jesus through liturgy and prayer. The demand is surely there ... become so intimate with Jesus that we do not waver in our love for Him nor in our growing in His life-giving, total self-giving.

It is my prayer and wish that you and yours continue to have a Happy, Healthy, and Safe New Year! May Saint Michael the Archangel defend, guide, protect, and intercede for us always!

Fr. Larry