

My dear brothers and sisters, the Christmas Season has ended on Monday, after the celebration of the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord. Today's Gospel immediately follows the Baptism of Jesus, as John tells his disciples that **Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**. He relates to them that after he baptized Jesus, he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon him. Our Gospel reading tells us about who the Lord Jesus is and about the process of getting to know him more intimately. Jesus is "**the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world**" (Jn. 1:29). John the Baptist's reference to Jesus as the Lamb of God brings to mind several images. Like other people of that time, John would have been familiar with the prophecies about the **future Messiah**, so he could have been referring to **the servant of the Lord** in Isaiah 53: 1-12, where the servant was presented as the one who would bring salvation to God's people by bearing their sufferings and sorrows.

In addition, the servant was compared to a lamb being led to the slaughter house. So Jesus' identity could be understood in that context. The first chapter of John's Gospel focuses on the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, all of which prepare for the Incarnation: the Word of God made flesh in Jesus. John undoubtedly would also have been referring to **the paschal lamb** in Exodus 12:3ff, who had effectively saved the Israelites **from annihilation** at the time of their escape from slavery in Egypt. Again, John the Baptist would have been referring also to the story of Abraham's binding of his son, Isaac, in Genesis 22: 8-13, **where God provided the sacrificial lamb** thereby saving Isaac from death. John, who had long been preparing to announce the Messiah's arrival, would have had all these scripture passages in mind when referring to Jesus as the Lamb of God.

It is clear that John the Baptist had a definite understanding of Jesus' identity by using the image of the lamb. Jesus would be **the one to destroy sin and thus bring salvation to the world**. John wanted to make clear the distinction between the Savior and himself, whose task was to prepare the people for the great saving work of Jesus. In this context, we are reminded of the words spoken by the priest before the distribution of Holy Communion at Mass: '**This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**. Blessed are those who are called to his supper.' We also remember the details of the apparition of Our Lady at Knock in Ireland, where the central figure in the apparition was the Lamb of God, the innocent victim suffering for our sins, at the altar surrounded by angels, with Mary, Saint Joseph and all the Saints prayerfully looking on.

In the first reading, we heard the call of Samuel. Samuel was still a boy, perhaps no older than twelve years when God spoke to him. I just want to draw your attention to three points about his calling: namely, Samuel's obedience to Eli, the priest and his reverence for the Lord. Again, his readiness to grasp well and to carry out God's instructions, as he said: '**speak, Lord, your servant is listening**' (1 Sam.3:9). Eventually, Samuel became the leader of the people of Israel and a faithful prophet in Israel. Like Samuel, let us also make ourselves available to God and answer his call. Christ continues to call in many ways; we ought to show our readiness to follow him faithfully at all times.

Finally, dear friends; let us do our best to listen to the voice of our God and show our readiness to follow him. You may ask how are we to do that? The answer is simply, by practicing the virtues of **self-abandonment** as the way of life. Total self-abandonment to God's will, Jesus after his baptism, publically committed himself to the will of the Father. If this meant that he was to die to establish the Kingdom of God, well, so be it. Would this be easy? No! In the Garden of Olives, Jesus sweats blood over what he would have to do. Yet He abandoned himself to His Father, knowing that somehow the Father will conquer the world through him. We all want to go to heaven. How do we get there? We can get there by totally committing ourselves to God's will. In deed total self-abandoning to God is **the key to holiness**. Let us commit our way to the Lord, so that, we can join the Psalmist to say: **here am I, Lord; I come to do your will**. Amen!