

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

The first human being mentioned in John's Gospel is *John the Baptist*. He has a single function, ***to witness to the light***. We learn today how he carried out this function. Others give Jesus titles in the first chapter of John, but the Baptist's is a unique one which, though common in the Book of Revelation, occurs nowhere else in the gospels.

He pointed out Jesus as ***the Lamb of God***. In writings of the time, a lamb was a ***symbol of power***. God was expected to raise up such a lamb to deliver his people from the Romans. As a man of his time, the Baptist might have understood the term in this way. John the Evangelist would have other ideas. In Isaiah's final *Servant Song*, the Servant is described as a lamb being ***led to the slaughter***. This passage was applied to the passion of Christ. John the Evangelist however, like Paul, thought of Jesus in terms of the Passover Lamb. Pilate condemned Jesus to death at the very time when the Passover lambs were being slaughtered for the festival. When Jesus cried from the cross, "I thirst," he was given vinegar on a *hyssop stick*, a wood used in the Passover lamb ceremonies. Once he has died on the cross, we learn that not a bone of his was broken. This is an instruction of how the Passover Lamb is to be killed. Jesus, as Lamb of God, won liberation from sin just as the old Passover lamb brought liberation from Egypt.

The Baptist also witnessed to what he saw at the Baptism of Jesus. He heard a heavenly voice and saw ***the Spirit*** descend in form of a dove. This Spirit rested on Jesus. The Baptist had had a revelation of *the persons of the Trinity*. In his ministry, the Son would perform the works of the Father and once this mission was complete, would in turn hand on the Spirit to his disciples.

John the Baptist would also be a witness to what could happen to Jesus and anyone who follows him, and that is persecution and even death. Right at the beginning of the gospels, the Evangelist gives us the stark reminder of what a follower of Jesus is getting into. It is not all ***Jesus and me and a taste of eternity***, which does happen to only a chosen few, like Teresa of Avila, but such chosen also are called to suffer. But she was also called to the task of renewing the Carmelite Order. In a way, we become like John the Baptist, witnesses to Jesus and the Word of God in our lives, which also means turning the other cheek, walking the extra mile, giving our extra tunic or the equivalent, and so forth, but most especially, to be a ***witness to the love of God***.

There was a monastery that had fallen on rough times. This monastery had once housed hundreds of monks, but now there only a handful of monks left, barely enough to keep the place running. The abbot had known those wonderful times but now was old himself and knew there was not many years left in his own life. Over the years he had gotten into the habit of visiting and old rabbi who lived in the woods on the monastery grounds in a simple hermitage. He was a holy man who had gone through rough times himself and felt called to live out the rest of his days in prayer and isolation. But he did enjoy the occasional visits of the abbot and came to realize that this was an important part of his ministry, just listening and sharing.

One day the abbot, as usual, went to visit the old rabbi and poured out his worry and sorrow. He shared with the hermit how he had finally accepted the fact that the monastery was dying due to lack of vocations. The hermit was unusually quiet this time, not saying much but only nodding as the abbot spilled out his heart.

Then all of a sudden, the rabbi straightened up and said in a very serious voice, "I must share this with you, but tell no one. It has been revealed to me that one of you is the Messiah!" This was unusual for the rabbi and the abbot was so stunned and speechless that he went back to the monastery, forgetting to even thank the hermit!

Naturally, the monks knew that something had happened between the hermit and their abbot, after all they had been living together for years, and this time he was unusually quiet, not sharing anything. Finally, the abbot had to share with someone. So, he finally shared with his best friend the message from the old rabbi. He said, "One of us is the Messiah!"

Do you think his best friend could keep his trap shut? No! He told his best friend. After a short time everyone knew. But every monk kept thinking to themselves, "It can't be me, maybe the other monk?" Slowly their whole attitude and even posture to each other changed over time, showing more respect and kindness and tenderness, just in case. Always a respectful nod here and a gentle touch there, just in case. After a while, the whole monastery had gone through a change. After a while, even the outsiders mentioned to each other how much the monks loved each other. They started to attract vocations. The rabbi had died by now, but he never did say if it would be one of them or maybe someone new joining their monastery, but just in case.

