

Call to Share Homily

BY ARCHBISHOP JOSEPH F. NAUMANN • SECOND SUNDAY, ORDINARY TIME A • JANUARY 14-15 2017



Dear friends in Christ,

Some people have commented to me that they find my voice to be soothing. I hope this does not mean that I put them to sleep. Although if I am able to bring someone to a level of such peace and serenity that they can sleep while sitting up in a pew, my homily will have accomplished some practical good.

A few months ago, I had the occasion to visit St. Louis in order to participate in some significant family events for long time, special friends. One of these celebrations involved a couple, who both served terms as the President of the Youth Group in my first parochial assignment. While I cannot take credit for introducing them to each other, I believe that I played some role in their decision to begin dating. More than 30 years ago, I had the privilege of celebrating their Wedding.

I always find fascinating the story of how married couples meet. It is intriguing to hear how God arranged for someone to meet their spouse. Often times, it does involve a mutual friend introducing them to each other. This match-maker always has a special place in the hearts of couples.

This past October I made a Pilgrimage to the Holy Land where I had the opportunity to celebrate Mass near the place where it is believed that John the Baptist uttered the words of today's Gospel: **"Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."** John the Baptist was the ultimate match-maker, as he introduced his disciples to Jesus, the *Lamb of God*. John the Baptist recognized the true identity of Jesus long before anyone else.

With true humility, John told his disciples that Jesus is the One for whom John had been preparing them. John was not desperately trying to hang on to his disciples, but instead, he pointed his followers to open their hearts to the One sent to liberate humanity from the shackles of sin and death – to the only One who could satisfy the deepest longings of their hearts. John understood that he must decrease as Our Lord increased.

John, identifying Jesus as the *Lamb of God*, contains a richness and depth of meaning that would have been appreciated by his disciples. For a first century Jew, the term *Lamb of God* was a clear reference to the Passover Lamb whose blood splashed on the door posts of their ancestors' homes protected them from death and opened up the pathway to freedom. Moreover, it was the flesh of this same Lamb that provided them with nourishment for the beginning of the journey from the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land.

John proclaimed Jesus to be the *Lamb of God*, who will not only rescue those who believe in Him from death at a particular moment, but offered His followers the gateway to eternal life. Jesus is the *Lamb of God*, who rescues His disciples, from being a slave to our passions and sins that prevent us from experiencing the joy and freedom of God's love for us.

The Lamb of God is an image coined by God Himself describing the gift of His unconditional love for us that is ultimately revealed in Jesus. Before receiving Holy Communion today, the priest will elevate the sacred host containing the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus and declare: **"Behold, the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away this sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb."**

If we are open to the great miracle of grace that transpires at each Mass, we allow Jesus through this Blessed Sacrament to impress upon our hearts the depth and power of His love. Our Lord comes to cure the wounds of our sins and open up for us the pathway to complete joy and abundant life.

If we believe that the greatest gift we have ever received is our friendship with Jesus, then how can we help from desiring to share so great a gift with others? We, who are blest to share in the *Supper of the Lamb*, receive a mission to bring the love of Jesus to others and to introduce them to the only One who has the ability to bring lasting joy and peace to their hearts.

Like John the Baptist, we are to introduce others to the *Lamb of God*. Each one of us is called to be God's match-makers – to taste the special joy that results from introducing another to Jesus and allowing them to experience His liberating, merciful love. We are each called to invite others to dine at the *Supper of the Lamb*.

One of the ways in which we are called to bring the love of Jesus to others is through our prayers and donations to the annual *Archdiocesan Call to Share* appeal. Your sacrificial gift to *Call the Share* helps our Church: 1) surround with love mothers experiencing a difficult pregnancy, 2) provide scholarships for children wishing to attend a Catholic school, 3) make it possible for youth to participate in camp at Prairie Star Ranch; 4) prepare couples for marriage, 5) provide opportunities for couples to renew and strengthen their marriages, 6) support college Campus ministry programs, 7) equip teachers to be strong witnesses of Faith to their students, 8) welcome immigrants and help them feel at home in a new land, 9) provide quality care to the elderly at Villa St. Francis skilled nursing center and so much more. Last year, your generosity made it possible for the Archdiocese to begin a new ministry to assist families with the care of a child or adult family member with special needs.

The amount of your gift is not as important as the sacrifice which it represents. Jesus, the *Lamb of God*, made the ultimate sacrifice by His death on Calvary. He set a high bar against which to measure our own sacrificial gifts to support the mission of the Church that Our Lord founded. ***Giving is a Holy Act*** by which we imitate the generosity of God who has given us everything.

Before deciding what you will give to *Call to Share* this year, I ask you first to ponder God's blessings in your life. Consider the many ways in which He has showered you with His merciful love. May your gift be an expression of gratitude from a heart that is overflowing with joyful thanksgiving for God's abundant blessings! Your gift will help our Church to bring the love of Jesus to thousands and to provide thousands with the opportunity to develop a friendship with Jesus. Your donation to *Call to Share* makes you one of God's match-makers. Remember: ***Giving is a Holy Act!***