

***To Give Without Counting the Cost***  
**Reflection on the Gospel-2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year B**  
**(John 1:35-42)**

-Veronica M. Lawson RSM

A personal call to a particular a way of life is not always easy to explain, even to oneself. At my religious profession, I chose the challenging motto “To give without counting the cost”. I have taken that motto seriously, even if I have occasionally been tempted to change it to something more manageable. Today’s liturgy reminds us that, in a very real sense, all the baptised are called to the same commitment, to give without counting cost.

The first reading describes a prophetic call, the “call” of the young Samuel who is to become a prophet of great stature within Israel. The story insists that it is God who takes the initiative and Samuel who hears God’s call. Initially Samuel hears the word of God, but needs an interpreter in order to understand the import of God’s word to him. The priest Eli acts as interpreter and guide, so that Samuel can respond with confidence and faith and grow up to speak God’s word to the people.

The gospel focuses on the “call” to discipleship, a call that is addressed to every baptised Christian. The opening scene depicts John the Baptist with two of his disciples. John actually points the two disciples away from himself and towards Jesus whom he identifies as “the lamb of God”. What does it mean to call Jesus “God’s lamb”? Does the expression refer to the *Passover lamb* whose blood signifies deliverance? Is it a reference to the *Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53* who takes on the sins of the many? Is it an image of *the lamb that God provides for Abraham’s sacrifice* (Genesis 22)? Is it *the apocalyptic lamb* of Jewish literature of the time, the powerful conquering lamb that destroys evil in the world? Is it intended to suggest vulnerability as in the prophecy of Jeremiah 11:19 (“I was like *a gentle lamb led to the slaughter*”).

There is never a simple explanation for the symbolism in John’s gospel. There can be many levels of meaning at the one time. The symbol of strength in vulnerability certainly has potential for understanding who Jesus is in this gospel. John 1:29 tells us that the Lamb of God “takes away” the sinful condition of the world. Twenty-one centuries down the track there is still violence and hunger and exploitation of planetary resources on a massive scale. The work of the one strong enough to risk vulnerability so that others may have life, the work of God’s Lamb, is also the work of disciples. It is the way of those who hear God’s call and choose to walk the way of Jesus of Nazareth, in openness and love for God’s people. The call to discipleship is a call to pour out one’s lifeblood for the sake of the gospel, “to give without counting the cost”. Maybe I should not be too eager to relinquish my motto!