

**Second Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year B
(Jan. 18, 2009)**

What Are You Looking For?

To begin, I must confess that I could certainly take Jesus far more seriously than I do. And I am convinced that if everyone in this world who claims to be Christian really did take Jesus seriously this would be a very different world.

But I would like to take one step back and say that perhaps the reason why we do not take Jesus seriously is that we do not really know or we do not really love him. St. Ignatius Loyola in his Spiritual Exercises has the retreatant spend a lot of time contemplating the mysteries of the life of Christ. His instruction to the retreatant is that he or she at the beginning of their prayer should ask God for a special grace, really a three-fold grace: to know Jesus more intimately, love him more ardently, and follow him more closely. Do you remember the play and movie “Godspell” and the song “Day by Day”? The song says, “Day by day three things I pray: see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly.” It’s the Ignatian grace: to know, love, follow.

In our Gospel today we hear about two people who came to know Jesus more intimately, love him more ardently, and to follow him more closely.

Recall the scene: John the Baptist is baptizing by the river Jordan. He sees Jesus passing by. That is a grace. And John responds to the grace. He points Jesus out and says, “There is the lamb of God.” And with that simple statement it seems to me he does two things. First of all he encourages his own followers to transfer their allegiance to Jesus. It’s time for him to move off the scene. He has done the work he came to do. He has prepared the way and now he lets the others know that Jesus is the one to follow. At the same time there is a caution in that statement. That phrase, Lamb of God, is fraught with meaning: any good Jew would immediately think of the Passover lamb whose blood saved the first-born of the Israelites and allowed them to escape captivity, to be liberated from oppression. John warns his disciples that following this lamb could also

entail sacrifice. But then in the Christian scriptures there is another lamb, the lamb of the Book of Revelation that sits enthroned in heaven after vanquishing the forces of evil. So, whoever is willing to risk the sacrifice of following the Lamb of God will share the joy and victory of that same lamb's glory.

And so they followed him. Jesus turns, sees them and asks, "What are you looking for?" Now this is not the trite stereotypical question you might ask someone who is stepping on your heels. Remember this is John's Gospel and there is always more going on than immediately meets the eye. What he is really asking them is to look deep into themselves. Why is it, Jesus asks, that you are turning to me? Why are you turning to the Lamb of God? They obviously are not yet ready to answer that question so instead they ask him a question: where do you live? Where are you staying? Jesus says, "Come and see." And John the Evangelist tells us they went and stayed with him that day and did not leave until the next morning.

But when they left him they were different people. Something had happened in that encounter. One of them, Andrew, goes to his brother, Simon and brings him to Jesus. Isn't that exactly what a disciple is supposed to do? To bring others to Jesus. Isn't that what we are also supposed to do?

In giving retreats I often encourage people to spend some time praying over that scene. I encourage all of you to do the same. In your imagination, go with Jesus and those two disciples. Listen to their conversation. What do they talk about? Do they get to the point where they can tell Jesus what they are looking for, what they want their lives to be like? And what does Jesus say to them? Does he talk about his mission from the Father? Does he ask them to join him in that mission? Does he tell them what he is looking for?

And then in your imagination can you see Jesus turn to you, look you in the eye, and ask you that question, "What are you looking for?" And what do you answer?

The lives of those two disciples changed because they spent time with Jesus. Our lives, too, can change if we spend time with Jesus. Sometimes when I suggest that to people they say, "Yeah, that's just what I'm afraid of," as though Jesus might be calling them to go somewhere they do not want to

go.

At any rate, I heartily recommend spending time with Jesus. It may just be a few minutes each day thinking of how he loved us and gave himself for us; how he is still present to us in the Eucharist that we share when we come to worship; how he is present in all the people around us, in every circumstance of our lives. We might ask him to help us recognize him and respond to him. We might read a bit of the Gospels each day and reflect on what we have read, asking God to help us see how what we read affects our lives. We might take advantage of the many opportunities our parish offers to spend some time with Jesus. The annual parish retreat is coming up on the weekend of Feb. 6-8. There will be a week of guided prayer for those who wish beginning Sunday, Feb. 8, many occasions when we can respond to Jesus' invitation to come and see, time to ponder the question Jesus put to the disciples and puts to us today, "What are you looking for?"