

Homily on John 1:35-42

January 12, 2018

Intro: Our infant's first words are indelibly recorded. Recently a mother told me her child's first three words were, "Mommy," "Daddy," and "Starbucks." We remember the first words an old friend said to us. And so it is with the gospels: the first words of Jesus in each gospel sound the keynote for that gospel. Today we hear Jesus' first words in John's gospel.

John: John the Baptist proclaimed a baptism of water purifying Israel for God's power in the world. His disciples had an eager anticipation of what was coming, but no definite idea of how this was to take place. One day John sees Jesus passing by and says to Andrew and another of his disciples, "Behold the Lamb of God." *Lamb of God* is puzzling. It was not a title of anyone in the Bible; it was not a known description. But John's interest meant something to them and so they followed Jesus to see who he was. When Jesus sees them following him he says his first words in this gospel: "*What are you looking for?*" They are caught off guard; they don't know exactly what they are looking for. Finally they blurt out, "Teacher, where are you living?" It was enough: Jesus invites them to come and see his place. When they come, they are so captivated by him that they stay with him for hours.

What did Jesus say to them? We cannot know. We only know the conclusion the disciples drew from the conversation: Jesus was the long-awaited messiah. He must have spoken of his vision of God and the renewal of his people Israel. He must have said something of his way to renewal, through a justice based on compassionate love as the only way to true peace. But we don't know; we have to read the rest of the gospel to find out who he was and what he meant.

When Andrew brings Peter to him, we already get the notion that Jesus is aiming at a lasting community which will be founded on Peter as the Rock, which is what *Kephas* means in the Aramaic language and *Petros* means in Greek.

The Meaning for us comes from Jesus' first words: *What are you looking for?* This is the question you have to keep asking yourself, and the members of your family.

Our children may be looking for a place on the basketball team. Our adolescents may be looking for the date with that attractive boy or girl, or they may be focused on a scholarship to that university. You may be looking for job security, for a higher wage, for millions of dollars with Amazon. You may be looking for safety in our streets, for a political party that really stands for your values. Each of these things is important in its own time and place, but they are not the answer that Jesus is looking for. And they are not your own real answer.

What you are really looking for is a relationship with Jesus that transforms your life. You are looking for his healing love. You are looking for what Pope Francis calls the joy of the gospel. That is the hunger of every human heart, no matter how confused are our minds.

Next Sunday we begin Mark's description of who Jesus is, and what he does. We will be reading from that gospel on Sundays for the next ten months. Besides the Sunday gospels and homilies, you can read a chapter a month. Read the gospel as you would read a rich short story, an episode at a time. Look at the face of Jesus in what he says and in what he does. Watch his tender care for the lepers as the outcasts of his society, his love of children and widows, his patience with his dim-witted disciples, his courageous confrontation of the scribes and Pharisees for their turning God's will into a prison. Expect to find a Jesus whom you have not before known, because the Lamb of God is always deeper and beyond our ability to bottle him up.

Fall in love with Jesus; it is what you are looking for. The good news.