



Archdiocese of San Antonio
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**Memorial of St. Agnes
Mass with Legatus of San Antonio
January 21, 2014**

God always does just as he wills. His ways are not our ways, and often he asks things of us that challenge us or even frighten us. But his ways are holy and set us free.

The Prophet Samuel was sent to anoint a new king, even while the current ruler, King Saul, was on the throne. Still, God called him to this dangerous task. He took with him an animal for sacrifice, a young heifer, and made his way to see Jesse in Bethlehem. Jesse and seven of his eight sons purified themselves and came out to the sacrifice. But God showed his authority, as one-by-one he rejected the eldest of Jesse's sons. None of them were to be king, even though they were tall and strong and would have made great choices in the eyes of the crowd. Finally, when he had gone through those seven, Samuel asked if Jesse had any more sons. Jesse replied, almost with disbelief, that he did have another son, the youngest who had not merited coming to the sacrificial banquet, but was out tending the sheep. So Samuel made them send for David, and when the boy walked in, God chose him and instructed Samuel to anoint him as the one who was to be king.

God does what he wills. Jesus, the heir to the great throne of David that was started with that anointing so many years before, uses the David's own actions to remind the Pharisees that God is not subject to our human sensibilities. He reminds them that David, when he was in need, ate the bread dedicated to God and the priests of the temple. David took this forbidden bread with the blessing of God, and Jesus'

disciples ate in their need even on the Sabbath, because it was God who had given them what they needed. God does what he wills.

So, who would have guessed that one of the most beloved martyrs of our Church, celebrated for centuries even from the early years of our faith, would be a 13-year-old girl named Agnes. The witness of her life, which we celebrate today, challenges us just as much as God's calling of David, or Jesus' words to the Pharisees regarding the Sabbath. Agnes was a beautiful girl, well liked by many around her. She had a strong faith and a deep love of Jesus Christ. She heard Jesus' calling to consecrate herself to virginity. Agnes would tell those around her, "Jesus Christ is my only Spouse." And she lived this conviction with all that she was. When the governor's son caught sight of Agnes, he became infatuated with her and wanted to take her as *his* bride, but Agnes refused. She refused when he offered her riches, and she refused when he offered her power. She was the bride of Christ, and she would settle for no other. To try and break her, the governor and his son locked Agnes away until she would change her mind and renounce her faith in her Lord. Agnes continued to resist so the governor put her into a brothel to humiliate her and steal the virginity that she valued so much. But God protected her and she emerged from that place pure and joyful. Lastly, when she would not renounce her love for God, she was sent to her death. As she stooped to place her head on the block, she prayed for those around her and awaited the moment when she would meet her Spouse face-to-face. Like the animal sacrificed in the reading from Samuel today, Agnes, whose name sounds similar to the word for lamb in Latin, allowed herself to be a sacrificial lamb that would show the world the power of faith.

What a tremendous faith she had indeed! God shows us the power of faith in the life of a mere child. God does as he wills. He calls who he calls, and only through faith can we see as he sees. How strong is our faith in God? I know that I am humbled when I think of her unwavering faith in the face of death by the sword, and how I struggle sometimes with being faithful in far less serious circumstances. This is the powerful witness of St. Agnes, and the challenge that her martyrdom poses for us. We struggle to be faithful at many times: in our relationships with difficult people, in our

business dealings, and even when the clear teachings of our faith are not politically or socially expedient. Yet, these struggles are nothing compared to giving our lives for the faith. Young St. Agnes challenges us to have courage no matter what. It is true that God calls us to things that are difficult, or even to things that may hurt our status or our bottom line, but there is nothing more important than honoring our Lord and remaining faithful to him.

May St. Agnes intercede for us in the face of God's will for our lives. May she and Our Lady, who herself was called to face shame and rejection to carry the Lord in her womb, help us by their example and their prayers to remain faithful. God does as he wills, and following his will can be hard. But he has called us to be his servants; may we be granted the courage to be always faithful.