



The Lamb of God: Our Way to Redemption

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“Behold the Lamb of God, / behold him who takes away the sins of the world.”

With the revised translation of *The Roman Missal*, the priest will say these words as he holds up the consecrated host just before Holy Communion. This change in the words of the Mass is a slight one from the previous translation: “This is the Lamb of God / who takes away the sins of the world.” With these words, the priest takes on the role of John the Baptist whose function then, as now, is to point to Christ, who is just as capable of taking away our sins in this Eucharist as he was some 2,000 years ago as the sacrificial lamb on the cross.

It is interesting that the liturgy puts this quotation from John the Baptist adjacent to the words “Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb,” which alludes to Revelation 19:9 (NAB). The lamb is the most frequent image for Christ in the book of Revelation, and, perhaps more significantly, the “supper of the lamb” in Revelation refers to the wedding feast of Christ and his Bride, the Church. What is interesting is that, in a passage a little beyond the one quoted above from the Gospel according to John, John the Baptist calls himself the friend of the Bridegroom, and then later is beheaded because he protested the illicit marriage of King Herod. The beauty is that the Baptist, who was a celibate, gave his life defending the

sanctity of marriage. The liturgy delights in this type of wordplay. Eucharist is the foretaste of the heavenly wedding feast, and so we have a celibate priest speaking the words of the celibate John the Baptist to the Bride of Christ the Church—you, the assembly—and pointing to Christ, the Bridegroom. The previous translation stated, “Happy are those called,” but the revised translation states that those who are called are “blessed.” Regardless of whether we feel happy or sad when we come to Church, we are all “blessed” in being called to Holy Communion with our Bridegroom. And we hope always that this Communion increases our longing all the more for the heavenly feast.

As we continue to look at the liturgy, we see that the assembly’s response to the priest just before Holy Communion comes from Matthew 8:8 and Luke 7:6–7. The revised translation is more faithful to the scripture that underlies this prayer. Many may never have realized that they were quoting the words of the Roman Centurion in Luke’s account of the Gospel. The Centurion had asked Jesus to heal his servant, and when Jesus agreed, saying that he would come to the house, the Centurion replied, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you enter under my roof; only say the word and my servant shall be healed” (NAB). Jesus responds to the Centurion’s words by saying that never in all of Israel had he found such faith, and he heals the servant from a distance. The liturgy asks us to call to mind the faith, humility, and reverence of this Centurion, who sought the healing power of Jesus, but felt unworthy to have Jesus come under the roof of his house. The Christian who approaches the altar should have the same faith, humility, and reverence in preparing to receive the Holy Eucharist under the “roof” of our body. Just as the roof is the external shelter for what is most important to us as social beings—our family—so too is our body the “roof” or external shelter for that which is most precious to us as individuals—our soul.

The Church places three scripture readings side by side in the liturgy and communicates so much with so little. We are reminded of the mutual support that celibates and the married can provide for each other: the celibate defending the sanctity of marriage and the married providing support and friendship to the celibate—the friend of the Bridegroom. We are reminded that our Communion derives from the sacrifice of the Lamb who has taken away our sins. We are reminded that this banquet meal is a foretaste of the heavenly wedding feast. We are reminded that in coming to Holy Communion, we are to have the attitude of the centurion in Luke’s account of the Gospel, a man of faith, humility, and reverence. And we are reminded that we are also in need of healing, just as the centurion’s servant was.

In this Eucharist, may we indeed find the healing and forgiveness we need and the eternal love and commitment of the Bridegroom, whom we need above all else.

