

Isaiah 49:1-7
Psalm 40: 1-11
1 Corinthians 1:1-9
John 1: 29-42

LAMB of GOD

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A little Bible Study for us today:
John's take on The Lamb of God.

John's Gospel was written, or finished, in the second century,
so he's a late bloomer, so to speak,
and has his own theological intent, separate from the other three.
John the Gospel-writer stands in front of the curtain,
giving the opening monologue to the drama:
"In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God,
and the Word was the Light of the World."
Then the Gospel-writer steps aside as the curtain pulls away for the first act,
displaying the backdrop scenery of the Jordan River
and John the Baptist, the other John, steps into the water.

Then John the Gospel-writer switches and the Light of the World,
in the middle of his first scene,
and the Light, Jesus, becomes the Lamb of God.
"There," the Baptist says pointing to Jesus, "is the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sins of the world."
It is a song we sing at every Mass,
"Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on us."
Did you ever wonder where that came from and why we sing?

The concept of the sacrificial lamb of God is prevalent
throughout the theology and practice of Hebrew Scripture.
The Paschal Lamb of the sacred observance of the Passover
is *the* prime element of the Jewish remembrance
of God's saving act of the Hebrew people
from the oppression of Egyptian tyranny.
Throughout Jewish history and ritual remembrance, the Lamb of God,
and the sacrifice of blood, the sign of Passover on the door-posts of the Hebrew people.

But in Christian theology?

The Paschal Lamb is mentioned in passing only once in Mark and Luke, solely as a temporal reference at almost the end of the story:

“On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, Jesus’ disciples said to him, ‘Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?’ ”

Mark 14:12

That is, the Last Supper, the day before the Crucifixion, almost the end of Mark’s and Luke’s Gospel stories. Nowhere in Matthew’s account is there a mention of the Lamb of God, and Matthew being perhaps the most Jewish of the Gospels. Why is the concept of Jesus being the sacrificial Lamb of God not brought into their, and through them our, understanding of Jewish-Christian theology? It is only in the, perhaps, latest account of the Gospel, John’s reflection, that the idea of Jesus being “the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” comes. And in John’s own Revelation, at the end of the Bible, there are almost 30 references to the Lamb of God sitting on the Throne of Heaven. Why is this Jesus, as the Lamb, so important to Evangelist John?

Another Biblical minutia - one asks which day of the week was the Last Supper? The Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark and Luke place it as a Seder on the Thursday night. John, however, places it on Wednesday, so that Jesus will be sacrificed as his Paschal Lamb for the Passover celebration.

Again, I ask myself, Why is this Jesus, as the Lamb, so important to Evangelist John? And why then, if so, is this proclamation important to me? Why do we sing it at every celebration of Jesus’ sacrifice in the Mass? It must be so, for the image of the Lamb of God, risen, triumphant and bearing the banner of salvation has been offered in Christian artwork, liturgical texts, and hymns throughout all Christian traditions from the first decades of the faith, in the artwork of the Roman catacombs.

My take on it is that throughout human history, God has ever made sacrifice for us, and especially in the life, death and resurrection of Christ Jesus for *our* sins.

Which is why we cry out at every gathering of the faithful,
“Jesus, Lamb of God, have mercy on me a sinner.”

Anthony Clavier writes,

“In the Holy Meal, we remember. We bring to life in the here and now the sacrifice, once offered for the sins of the whole world [throughout all time]. We eat and drink, ingest, the life of Jesus, the Lamb of God...

Before we reach that point in the service, we hear Jesus the Rabbi, the authorized teacher, expounding to us God’s law, the words Jews heard at the time of Jesus and the words we Christians have heard since then. And we corporately confess our misdeeds, our missteps and flirtations with evil.

We do so as God’s community of priests, as we stand between God and the human race, the nations, the Church, our families and ourselves.

Sermons that Work, 2017

Fr. Clavier concludes,

Sitting in your pew this morning, look up, and with the mind of faith see the Lamb of God, the one you call Rabbi, Teacher, and in your hearts pray with thanksgiving, “Have mercy on us. And then, grant us your peace.”

AMEN.

CHILDREN’S SERMON -

Sheep and Lambs

a stuffed toy sheep.

Can you tell me any shepherds you know from the Bible?

Yes. King David when he was a boy was a shepherd.

I bet you didn’t know that Moses was a shepherd.

He took care of his father-in-law, Jethro’s, sheep.

Abraham kept sheep.

And Abel, Adam and Eve’s son was the first shepherd.

There are many others throughout the Hebrew Scripture.

Then the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel talk about sheep and shepherds.

We call Jesus the Good Shepherd.

And today, we hear John the Baptist calling Jesus “The Lamb of God.”

In the Old Testament, and even in the Gospels,

the people of God would take a sheep and offer a sacrifice.

That’s why we think of Jesus as a sacrificial Lamb,

because we know he offered himself, was killed,

and yet rose again,

and we remember that sacrifice when we take Holy Communion.

Let's pray:

Jesus, you offered yourself as a sacrifice for our sins. Each week we remember what you did for us, how you offered yourself. We thank you for the gift you have given us. Help us to find ways we can offer ourselves to save others as you have saved us.

AMEN.