

Monday 4th January 2021

Gospel John 1:35-42

The Gospel begins with John the Baptist stating, “Behold the Lamb of God,” which is what the priest says as he elevates sacred Host and Chalice after the consecration at Mass. Why is Jesus referred to as the Lamb of God?

The Jewish people understood that ritual sacrifice (in the Temple) restored communion with God after some ruction because of sin or illness (including childbirth which was considered to make a woman “unclean”). The two greatest sacrificial feasts were the Passover and the Day of Atonement. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, a number of beasts were sacrificed and the high priest would enter the most sacred part of the Temple, the Holy of Holies, which was behind a huge curtain, and utter the most Holy Name of God. This was for the forgiveness of sins – reasoning that sacrificing precious animals was some recompense for sin.

The Passover sacrifice celebrated freedom from slavery in Egypt. The Jewish understanding is that what God does in time, He does in all eternity, and so as historically God enabled their ancestors to cross the Red Sea to freedom, He continues today to save His people from slavery when they eat the sacrificial lamb.

Keeping these two sacrifices in mind, we can understand both the comment of John the Baptist and the priest’s proclamation at Mass. John’s Gospel from beginning to end, presents Jesus, true God and true man, as our Passover sacrifice; the one who would free us from slavery from sin.

When Jesus died, the massive curtain in the Temple was torn from top to bottom (Mt. 27:51) indicating that God was now accessible to all, at any time. The letter to the Hebrews explains that when Jesus died, He entered the “Holy Place, taking not the blood of bulls and calves but His own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12). Linking these together, we see that in Jesus’ death on the Cross He entered Heaven, the true Holy of Holies, taking His own divine blood, the only blood that can save us from slavery to sin.

Jesus is the True Lamb, the fulfilment of all the animals that were sacrificed and consumed each year. Jesus is also God and what God does in history He does for eternity. Because we are united to Him in Baptism, we are united to Him in His death. This is how His death frees us from slavery to sin, and this is why Baptism is necessary for salvation. We are not worthy of this amazing gift, we have not earned this salvation, it's given to us freely. Yet by consuming the Lamb of God when we receive Him in the Eucharist, we more fully share in His one single sacrifice that saves us from slavery to sin. What an amazing gift!