2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time A + 18 Jan 2026 + Isa 49:3,5-6 + Jn 1:29-34

One of the most beautiful, and in my mind, most moving parts of the Mass is point at which the priest elevates the host and the chalice, which have become the body and blood of the Lord, and proclaims, *Ecce Agnus Dei—behold the Lamb of God. Behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.* This is, perhaps, the pinnacle of the whole Mass, and so I'd like to take some time today to meditate on this most moving moment by considering what was, what is, and what is to come.

First, "what was." The basis of the *Ecce Agnus Dei* comes from our Gospel today. Now last Sunday we celebrated the Baptism of our Lord in the Jordan River by John the Baptist. Today's Gospel follows right after that event. John recalls how he had witnessed the Holy Spirit *come down like a dove from heaven and remain upon [Jesus]* at Jesus' baptism. And that God Himself had told John the Baptist that *on whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain, He is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit*. And so John knows that Jesus is no ordinary man; He is, in fact, the *Lamb of God.*

So what does this mean, *"Lamb of God"*? Well, in order to understand this, we have to look at two key Old Testament texts. The first is the Hebrew Passover in the book of Exodus. The Pharaoh of Egypt had enslaved the Hebrew people, and obstinately refused to free them after multiple requests by Moses on behalf of God. So finally, God threatens to send an angel of death to kill all the first-born males in Egypt. But Pharaoh still refuses to set the Hebrews free. And so God tells Moses to instruct each Hebrew family to slay a male *lamb* without any blemishes, and put its blood on the doorposts of their homes. When the angel of the Lord 'saw' the blood, he would *pass over* that house, and leave it unharmed. The family was then instructed to eat the roasted flesh of the lamb together with unleavened bread. On that very night, the Hebrews were finally set free, and began their journey home. The Passover feast was then to be observed forever as a memorial of their salvation by God from slavery and death, and is still celebrated by observant Jews to this day.

Next, we fast-forward a couple hundred years or so, and consider a passage from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. Isaiah is prophesying to the people of Judah—descendants of the ancient Hebrews, who are once again far from home; this time, exiled in the Land of Babylon. Despite their terrible loss of nationhood, land, and Temple, Isaiah gives them a reason to hope. He proclaims that the people will eventually be set free—not only from exile, but more importantly, from sin. This is because a mysterious *"servant of the LORD"*, whom we heard about in our 1st reading today, will *[make] himself an offering for [sins]…like a <u>lamb</u> that is led to the slaughter* (53:10, 7). But the identity of this "Servant"—this *"Lamb of God", "who takes away the sins of the world"* will remain hidden for another 500 years or so.

In our Gospel today, the mysterious Lamb of God, who brings *salvation…to the ends of the earth,* is finally revealed! By divine inspiration, John has the privilege to proclaim that the Lamb is Jesus! But the truth of his proclamation will only be made fully evident when Jesus hangs on the Cross. For there, Jesus, the sinless one—the lamb *without blemish*, will offer his life in sacrifice as God's *servant,* so that we might *pass over* from slavery to sin and death, unto eternal life. Christ's death and resurrection is the new and final Passover. For this reason, just as the Hebrews were instructed to eat the flesh of the sacrificial lamb in Egypt as a perpetual feast of their freedom, when we eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood sacramentally in the Most Holy Eucharist, we are set free from sin and death. It is no surprise then, that Jesus instituted the Eucharist while celebrating the Passover Himself.

And this brings us to "what is now": the Mass. To really appreciate what is going on at Mass, we need what is called a "Sacramental imagination." "Imagination" not in the sense of "make-believe," but in the sense of "seeing" what lies beyond our human sight, what lies beyond the "veil" between this life and the next. To see that the Mass isn't just some ritual or common meal, but the very wedding *supper of the Lamb* that St. John writes about in the book of Revelation. *Revelation* literally means "unveiling,"; and Revelation attempts to convey the vision John was given when God unveiled heaven before the eyes of his mind. And the vision of heaven that we are given in the book of Revelation is of a great wedding feast. The groom is called the "Lamb," His bride is the "Church," and the attendants are the angels and the Saints. Heaven is nothing less than the consummation—the final, eternal union of Jesus Christ, the "Lamb of God," with His bride, the Church—with all of us!

We usually think of heaven as "what is to come." But the wedding feast of the Lamb in heaven has already "started," even as it waits for each of us. And yet, each time we receive Holy Communion, we are already participating, in a mysterious way, in the perfect communion that we hope to enjoy with Christ in heaven. The Mass is as close to heaven on earth as we can get! This is why our sanctuary looks like heaven, why we adorn our church and our worship here with images that come from the images of heaven from Revelation.

Finally, what if you struggle to have this "sacramental imagination?" A few suggestions: First, just pray for it! Ask the Lord to unveil the reality of the Eucharist for you. I did that many years ago, and it is one of the big reasons why I am a priest today. Next, read the book "The Lamb's Supper" by Scott Hahn, where he writes about how this vision of the Eucharist as the wedding supper of the Lamb turned him from being a Presbyterian minister to a Catholic apologist. And finally, try to make Mass the center of your week, and the center of your life. Such as, not just finding a Mass time that fits your schedule, but fitting your schedule around Mass. Arrive early to clear your mind and heart, and don't rush out. Read the Mass readings in advance, so that you are ready to really "hear" them at Mass. Sing. Come to adoration. If you seek this, I am convinced that you will come to truly know what it means to say *blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb*!