

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time A – 20 January 2008

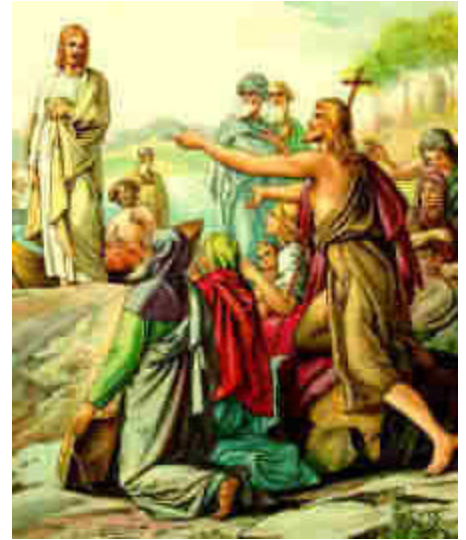
### LESSON: Jesus Is the Lamb of God

John the Baptist's **favorite title** for Jesus is "**the Lamb of God.**"

It also became one of John the **Evangelist's** favorite titles. He uses it here in his Gospel, and then he used it again, **twenty-nine times**, in the Book of Revelation.

It brings together **three images** that would have been **familiar** to the Jews of those times.

And so, by calling Christ the "**Lamb of God,**" St John is telling us that those ancient images are **fulfilled** in Jesus.



The **first** image:



- ✍ In the Old Covenant, God required the Jews to sacrifice a lamb twice a day to **expiate the sins** of the people (cf. Exodus 29:39).
- ✍ So the lamb **symbolized the price to be paid for sin.**

The **second** image:

- ✍ The primary holy day of the Jews was (and remains) the **Passover.**
- ✍ In the Passover ceremony each family sacrifices and eats a lamb to recall their **liberation from Egypt** in the

days of Moses.

- ✍ On that night, God allowed the death of all the firstborn children and animals of the **Egyptians**, but **spared** those of the Hebrews.
- ✍ In order to indicate which households the angel of death was to skip over, God commanded the Hebrews to kill a **lamb** and mark their **doorposts** with its blood.
- ✍ Thus the Passover lamb **signified God's merciful and saving love.**

The **third** image:

Finally, a **lamb going silently and docilely to be slaughtered** is one of the images used to describe the coming **Messiah.**

He was going to take Israel's sins upon **himself** and wipe them away through his **suffering** obedience.

And so, by calling Jesus the "Lamb of God," John **reminds** us that all of these Old Testament symbols had been **pointing towards Christ** - the true Savior.

Sometimes it is good for us to remember the **basics of our faith**.

The human race was created to live **in communion with God**, in whom alone we find happiness.

This is our **fundamental** purpose in life - it's the reason that nothing else in the world satisfies our **deepest desires**.

- ✍ Not **money**, because money **runs out**.
- ✍ Not **pleasure**, because pleasure **wears off**.
- ✍ Not **power**, because power **corrupts**.

Our hearts were made for **more** than all those things.

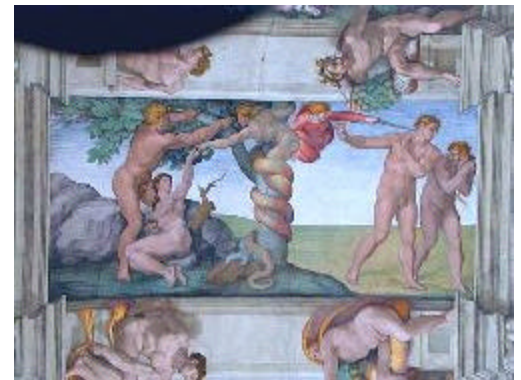
They were made **to love** and **be loved** with an **eternal** love, and that can **only** come from God.

But Adam and Eve **walked out** on God, and the human race became **lost** and fell under the power of the **devil**.

We couldn't save **ourselves**, so **Jesus** came to rescue us.

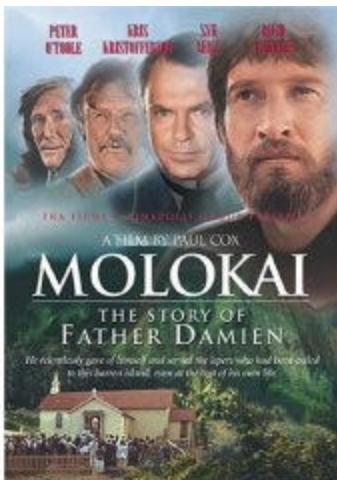
As a true man **and** true God, he was able to **end** mankind's rebellion **against** God and **reestablish** our communion **with** God.

It is hard to understand, but it's **true**.



## ILLUSTRATION: Blessed Damien Becomes a Leper

**Blessed Damien of Molokai** was a strong, hard-working, athletic priest who went to minister to a **leper colony** in Hawaii in the 1800s.



The bishop had arranged for priests to **take turns** on a three-month rotation, but when Father Damien saw the colony's **destitution**, he decided to **stay** and work there **full time**.

- ✍ He built hundreds of small **houses** to replace the **miserable huts** the dying lepers were living in.
- ✍ He laid **pipes** to bring in **fresh water** from inland springs.
- ✍ He built **coffins** and created a **cemetery** to bury

the dead who previously had been **piled** into shallow, mass graves.

- ✍ He established small **farming plots**, built **clinics and chapels**, formed a **choir and orchestra**, tended the lepers' **hideous** wounds with his own hands, and brought **dignity**, order, work, and hope back to the crowds of sick who **poured** into the colony.

For eleven years he worked there **tirelessly**.

- ✍ Then one Sunday morning in June of his **twelfth** year in Molokai, Fr Damien climbed to the ambo and read the **Gospel passage** for the day.
- ✍ He paused, looked out across his **crowded church**, which he and his lepers had **built**, and began his sermon: "**We lepers...**" he said.
- ✍ The congregation gasped. With those words he had **informed** them that at last he **too** had contracted the **dread** disease.
- ✍ For **four more years** he continued laboring on as his body **rotted away**, until death took him to his **reward**.

Blessed Damien was following the example of his Lord, Jesus Christ, who **freely took upon himself** the sorrows and suffering that sin had let loose among us.

Only out of **love** for us, the sinless **Son of God** offered himself as a **victim** on the cross for our **salvation**, thus becoming the sacrificial **Lamb of God**.

## **APPLICATION: Offering It Up**

Christ's **self-sacrificial, self-forgetful** love is so **central** to our faith that the Church reminds us of it **every time** Mass is celebrated by praying: "Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us."

- ✍ And when we receive Holy Communion, we are **receiving** the Lamb of God, **partaking** of the saving Lamb, just as the Jews of the Old Covenant partook of the Passover Lamb.
- ✍ And when we receive the Lamb of God with a **lively faith**, he **strengthens** us to follow his example.



Every day of our lives this fallen world is filled with **struggles and hardships**, big and little, that can become **instruments of salvation**.

By offering himself on the cross, Jesus **reconciled sinners** to God.

By offering **ourselves** on **our** crosses, we can do the **same thing**.

When we offer our **daily sufferings** to God in prayer, they become **channels of grace** for the conversion and sanctification of the world.

Pope Benedict XVI invited all Catholics to renew this ancient devotion of **offering up our sufferings** in union with Christ's.

Many people in the world don't **pray**, don't **believe**, don't **confess** their sins, are continuing in their **rebellion** against God...

We can be a **bridge** between them and God by offering up **our sufferings** through prayer, by being **Lambs with the Lamb**.

✍ Here is how Pope Benedict put it:

✍ *There used to be a form of devotion... that included the idea of "offering up" the minor daily hardships that continually strike at us like irritating "jabs", thereby giving them a **meaning**... Those who did so were convinced that they could **insert** these little annoyances into Christ's great "com-**passion**" so that they somehow became **part of the treasury of compassion** so greatly needed by the human race. In this way, even the small inconveniences of daily life could acquire meaning and contribute to the economy of good and of human love. Maybe we should consider whether it might be judicious to revive this practice ourselves (Spe salvi, 40).*

Today, when we **receive** the Lamb of God, let's do so from the **depths** of our hearts, filled with **gratitude** for his love and with a **deep yearning** to love him in **return**.

