

**We Need Our Lamb of God**

**January 15, 2017**

**John 1:29-44**

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from The Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world, Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

On the roof of a Catholic Church in Werden, Germany, you can see the stone carving of a lamb. The story behind that stone carving goes something like this… A man was working on the roof of this church when his safety rope broke and he fell headlong into the churchyard below. The yard was cluttered with huge stones. But the man was not hurt seriously. Between two of the stone boulders a lamb was nibbling grass. The man fell on the lamb, crushing it to death. Although the lamb died, it broke what would have been a fatal fall. In gratitude, the workman carved a lamb out of a stone and placed it on the roof. It was a gracious way of expressing his thanks to the animal that had unknowingly saved his life. How much deeper and more meaningful is our gratitude to Jesus, the Lamb of God, for saving us from the eternally fatal fall from grace? Willingly and lovingly Christ gave His life that we might live. That’s what St. John is talking about when he calls out in today's gospel: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” John the Baptist was the first to call Jesus the “lamb of God.” That was a title. Titles are symbols of prestige. For example, not everyone can hold the title “Doctor.” That’s a privilege. A title also describes an individual for good or bad.

When my precious Cleveland Browns left town in 1996 one of the stipulations was they couldn’t take the name the Browns. I’ve never really liked the name, Browns.” I’d prefer something more indicative of our playing style or even more descriptive of Cleveland. Now before you start jumping to the Mistakes by the Lake or simply Losers, let’s get real. I was thinking more like the Lakeside Warriors or maybe the Rockers since the Rock Hall of Fame is right down the street from the Cleveland Stadium. A lot is in a name. Melvin means Chief.

So, what does this name for Jesus tell us about who Jesus was. After all, lambs are helpless creatures. They’re born virtually defenseless. Lambs also tend to be awkward and clumsy. They seem to have a knack for getting into trouble. Why in the world would John refer to Jesus as the Lamb of God? Could it be that he was implying that Jesus was weak or unimpressive? No! The opposite is true. This was actually a prestigious title. To appreciate the significance of this title, lets first try to understand how the Jewish people perceived a lamb.

God had given the lamb a special place in the mind of all Israelites. For the Jews, the lamb carried religious connotations. The lamb was one of the animals used to symbolize the forgiveness of sins; that God would make atonement with all people, setting the world “at-one” with him. Already, in the Old Testament, the lamb carried this special meaning. Lambs played an important part in the Passover meal, commemorating how God delivered Israel from Egypt and from death. In fact, the word “lamb” became synonymous with the Savior. Isaiah uses the word in his prophecy concerning the Messiah: “He was led like a lamb to the slaughter”.

God promised he would send one who would come to be our Savior, to carry our sins for us. One day while on the bank of the Jordan River, John saw the one who was revealed to him by God. He saw Jesus, and he gave him the title, “Lamb of God.” John knew this was God’s Lamb; this was his sacrifice for us. That’s a prestigious title no one else could dare hold. In a culture that sacrificed lambs twice a day in the temple, Johns’ words were a kiss of death. “Here is the Lamb of God” also means, “Look, everyone, here’s the one that is going to be sacrificed.” Suddenly, as we understand the work of the Lamb of God, we see this name carries the ultimate prestige and the highest honor. John says this lamb, Jesus, is the one who takes away the sins of the world. He takes away the sins of the whole world! Literally, he rips us off. He actually steals away our collective and individual sins, prying them from us.

I remember when our home in Phoenix AZ was robbed. It was broad daylight on a Saturday mid-morning. We had just moved into a rented house in what we thought was a pretty good neighborhood. Our household goods had just been delivered on Friday and we were off to the Luke AFB Commissary to buy groceries. We had been gone only a few minutes when PJ realized she forgot her ID Card and we returned home. She ran in, grabbed the card and we were on our way. We returned a couple of hours later only to find the patio door pried open and our brand-new video player and stereo boom box were stolen. Over the years, we’ve laughed about the video player. When these were first coming out there were two different types and they took different formats of video tapes. We chose the Beta Max version. It was quite expensive, but within just a couple of months after that robbery the Beta Max company lost out to the VHS format and went out of business. They stole a very expensive, but very useless video machine… I recall my initial feelings when the robbery happened. I was angry. PJ and I both felt afraid and violated. Our privacy was invaded, and that eerie feeling loomed over us for some time. It was so bad we petitioned and were moved up to the top of the waiting list for base housing.

We feel the same way about our sins. “This is my business”, we tell Jesus, as we hoard away our sins, locking them up in our hearts and minds. We hold all sorts of sin in our dark places – greed, lust, hatred, jealousy, lack of self-control – the list goes on. We hide them away in our most private recesses of our lives. We don’t want any of them to see the light of day, much less the light of the Lamb of God.

As it is, we are born into this world intent on keeping hold of our trespasses and sins. This sinful flesh wants nothing more than to hold on to our decrepit nature. Our hearts want nothing more than to wallow in lust, envy, and greed. Whether it’s shame or guilt, we hide our sin just like Adam and Eve hid their nakedness from God in the Garden of Eden. We don’t want to let go of a single sin. We’re not willing to hand them over to Jesus. After all, it’s a matter of privacy! How dare God violate us and take away the things we love! So, Jesus, the Lamb of God – the perfect sacrifice – must come to us and snatch our sins away. He breaks into our lives and steals away all sin and grief, guilt and pain.

This is how it must be! Christ Jesus must come and rip us off! He has to snatch our sins from us. Just think of how Jesus does this. He doesn’t crush or break us. He doesn’t smash his way into our lives or jimmy the patio door open. Jesus snatched our sins from us by sacrificing himself for us. He came into this world to suffer and die on the cross, so that we wouldn’t have to face punishment. Jesus bore the wrath of his heavenly Father in our place. And in doing so, he paid the price for every last one of our sins. He snatched them from us by labeling himself as “Sinner of sinners”, and allowing himself to be nailed to the cross with all our transgressions. Then God raised from the dead proving that our sins no longer count. The price has been paid in full.

The best part is that we have God’s Word to remind us of this truth! John’s words – “Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” – are a source of comfort and joy. They redirect us. Jesus’ work of redemption provided for the needs of the entire world. And you can say with all confidence that your sins are forgiven. God has given us his Word on this matter so that we might believe and have hope. His Word is what leads us to faith to believe this blessed truth. And with faith in Christ our Savior, we can live confidently in this new life. Our lives are redirected.

The sad fact is many people allow their sins to direct and guide them. Sometimes we all allow our sins to direct us away from faith in Christ. Our goals become misguided. Sin clouds us to look to ourselves or our riches for salvation. For example, where our culture says, “Seek your place in the world!” our God says, “Seek ye first, the kingdom of God.” Where our culture bids us to “find yourself!” God calls us to “lose ourselves, and then find life.” Where our culture calls us to “be a self-made person!” God calls us to become “members together of one body...”. Where our culture teaches us to “look to your own needs and interests!” God calls us to have “the attitude of Christ Jesus, who took on the nature of a servant.” Where our culture promises, “You can have it all!” God calls us to “consider it rubbish, that we might gain Christ.” Where our culture mandates, “Be at the top of your game!” God calls us to “be crucified with Christ.”

May the faith given you at your Baptism redirect your life toward the Lamb of God who snatched away all your sin and gave you new life. May this Lamb of God be your source of hope, strength, and comfort, amen.