



Mass Parts 40/52: *Lamb of God*

The singing of the Lamb of God goes back to about the year 700. Its three part repetition connects it with the holiness of the Trinity. The first identification of Jesus as the Lamb of God is uttered by John the Baptist in the beginning of John's Gospel:

The next day he (John the Baptist) saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. (Jn 1:29)

The meaning of Jesus as the Lamb of God is found throughout Scripture, especially with the Passover Ritual and the prophecy of Isaiah in the "Songs of the Suffering Servant". In preparation for the Angel of Death to kill all of the first born in Egypt, the Israelites are to sacrifice a lamb and spread its blood on their doorposts. The Paschal Lamb takes on the suffering of the people and dies in their place (Ex 12). The lamb used must be without blemish on its coat and with no broken bones. The fulfillment of this is seen in Jn 19:36, where Jesus on the Cross does not have his legs broken like the two thieves.

Scattered throughout the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, there are four parts to a "Song of the Suffering Servant" (Is 42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11; 52:13-53:12). The contemporary meaning for Isaiah was the whole of Israel as the Suffering Servant, but there is also present a future prophetic meaning, finding fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The final part of the song will find its fulfillment in the Trial and on the Cross, as explained in Acts 8:32.

*Though harshly treated, he submitted and did not open his mouth;
Like a lamb led to slaughter or a sheep silent before shearers,
he did not open his mouth. (Is 53:7)*

The connection with the sacrifice is brought out even more explicitly in the Gospel of John, where Jesus is found guilty at the same hour as the lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple in preparation for the Passover Feast (Jn 19:14).

It is absolutely true that our salvation comes about only through our unity with Jesus, the slaughtered Lamb. Yet this is not the end of the story, for Christ the Lamb of God has also risen from the dead. He is the "Lamb that was slain" in Revelation 5:6, 12. He is the Lamb that will reign in heaven and will "wipe every tear from our eyes" (Rev 7:17). He is the Lamb that has conquered evil (Rev 17:14). The entire Mass is a participation in the great Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:7, 9). This is the marriage between the Lamb (Jesus Christ) and the Church. Even through death, we will live happily ever after.

-Fr. Kopp

Next Week: Fraction Rite