

Today's Gospel lesson with its account of the testimony that John the Baptist makes about Jesus and its description of how Andrew first visited with Jesus and then, on the following day, brought his brother, Simon Peter to meet Jesus is one of the best known of stories in the New Testament.

"Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" Immediately we are invited to ask the rather obvious question what is a Lamb of God that Jesus could be called **The** Lamb of God?

The most obvious answer is that John is referring to the thousands of lambs that were sacrificed daily at the temple in Jerusalem. The lambs that were sacrificed at the temple each day died as a way of thanking God for the abundance of the harvest, for the increase in the people's herds and flocks, and as a thank offering for the birth of a new child. This time of sacrifice was a time of communion: of communion between those who came to worship as the law required, and of communion between them and God.

The flesh of the lamb was consumed by the worshippers and by the priests who offered the sacrifices. Much as we do today as we gather to commune with God and to thank God for being our God, prayers were said, psalms were sung, scripture was read, and the people affirmed by their presence and by their offering that they were the children of God and brothers and sisters to one another. Some say it is these lambs of thanksgiving that John refers to when he calls Jesus 'The Lamb of God'?

Others say that John referring to another kind of lamb: to the Passover Lamb which every household in Israel slaughtered each year and whose blood was then painted on the doorposts of their homes as a way of remembering the first Passover. The flesh of the Passover Lamb was entirely consumed on the night of the Passover, thus commemorating the strength that God gave the people to make their escape from bondage in Egypt; an escape that led them to the land of promise.

But when John points at Jesus and says "behold the lamb of God" he says something more about Jesus than the images of the Passover Lamb and the Lambs of Thanksgiving might suggest to us. He says that this person, this "Lamb of God", provided by God's own hands, does more than simply spare the lives of his chosen people and help to bring them to the promised land. He is saying that this particular lamb has been given by God to take away the sins of the whole world.

What John is indicating when he points to Jesus and says "Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" is that this man is the one promised by Isaiah and so many of the other prophets: that he is the one who is sent by God to bring salvation to the ends of the earth; the one who will free all people from slavery to sin and reconnect them to the perfect and holy God who created and sustains us.

He is saying that Jesus will free all people from the sentence of death, not just those people God chose at the beginning to be his people. Furthermore he is giving to those who hear him an indication of how that would come about, namely by the offering of his body and his blood.

Just as the Passover lamb is slain so that its blood may cause death to pass by the homes of the children of Israel and its flesh may sustain the people as they escape from their bondage, and just as lambs in the temple were killed so that the prayers of thanksgiving and dedication might be heard by God and so that the people might rejoice and eat together; so the Lamb of

God who takes away the Sin of the World will offer his body and his blood for us - and to us - once and for all.

From the time of his baptism by John, Jesus is led like a lamb to his eventual slaughter in Jerusalem.

His teachings and his healings, the miracles he works and the journeys that he makes all of his ministry lead to one moment: his sacrifice on the cross. "Here is the Lamb of God" we say, as we stand stunned, watching our Saviour's blood drain from his body for our salvation.

And it was because John the Baptist said "look" that Andrew and another disciple turned and followed Jesus and became excited by what they experienced with him and became his disciples. And it was because of Andrew telling his brother Simon "We have found the Messiah" and then bringing Simon to him, that Simon became Peter the "Rock of the Church".

We are called to behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

We are called to follow Jesus and have the angel of the Lord's judgement pass over our houses and for us to escape from bondage and enter the promised land.

We are called to be like John and Andrew and Simon Peter and every disciple since, to call to those who trust us and to those who will hear our voice and say "look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world is *still with us* to make us free and to make us holy and to give us eternal life"