

Behold the Lamb of God,
Behold him who takes away
the sins of the world.

This is how John the Baptist
refers to Jesus in the gospel today,
and it's the image
I want to reflect upon today.

Some quick context here -
as we enter this season
after the Epiphany,
we begin always
with the baptism of Jesus,
and then,
with the call of his first disciples.

Even though we're in year A,
when we'd normally hear Matthew,
today the Gospel comes from John.

We do, at the end of today's reading,
see Jesus call his first disciples,

Next Sunday,
we'll hear Matthew's version,
a different take on how Jesus
begins his ministry.
but that's for next week.

For today,
we stay with Jesus
as the Lamb of God.
It's a very different image
of the coming Messiah,
than we usually get from John,

Who is more about
axes lying at the root of trees,
winnowing forks, chaff,
and unquenchable fire.

Can't get much farther away
from axes and fire
than a lamb.

It's a common image
not just in Holy Scripture,
and also in our liturgy,
and that's where i want
us to go today.

We have the hymn at
the fraction,
Alleluia,
Christ *our Passover
has been sacrificed for us,
referencing the passover lamb
who's blood on the doors
of the Hebrew people's homes
in Egypt,
delivered them from the
Angel of Death.

Right after the Breaking of the Bread,

we often say or sing this
anthem - O Lamb of God,
that takest away
the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

All our attention at that moment,
is on the saving action of Jesus,
as the lamb who was slain
for our deliverance,
our salvation.

Some priests,
me included,
repeat John's phrase
at the invitation to communion.

When we lift the bread and wine
before we say,
The Gifts of God
for The People of God,
we'll add exactly what John said -

Behold the Lamb of God,
Behold him that takest away
the sins of the world.

We are asking you to see
not just a silver cup and plate,
not just bread and wine,
but to see Jesus.

To see him truly present
in the midst of us,
and to realize that it is he
and not the priest
who invites us to the feast
Prepared for us,
since the foundation of the world.

The words are a reminder
that what we do at the altar every Sunday,
isn't just a memorial -
something we do to remember
what Jesus did.

It isn't just an ordinance -
something we do
because Jesus told us to.

It isn't even just a symbol,
something that lets us think
about and imagine Jesus
present with us.

It is Jesus himself, present
in forms of bread and wine,
hidden from our eyes
but not from our hearts and souls.

We meet him here,
every time we come to this altar.

It is the beauty, and the power,
and the mystery,
of the Eucharist,

That Jesus shows up
every time,
not because we deserve
to find him here,
but because

he desires us,
he *wants* to be with us.

At the end of the today's Gospel,
Andrew tells Peter,
"We have found the Messiah,"
but if you look carefully
at the story,
that really isn't accurate.

It isn't Andrew who finds Jesus;
Jesus finds him,
and so it is with us.

We may call Jesus a Lamb,
but he is also a shepherd,
and not just any shepherd,
but the Good Shepherd.

It is he who comes seeking us,
when we wander away,
the ones he calls his sheep,
his lambs.

And it is his faithfulness,
rather than our own,
that leads to our encounter
with him here, at this Eucharist,
and at every Eucharist.

Jesus, the paschal lamb,
the lamb that sits
at the center of the throne,

The Lamb of God,
that takest away the sins of the world
stands in our midst,
always calling us,
as he called Andrew and Peter,
not just to follow him,
but to come and dwell with him,
to abide with him for ever.