

After Our Lord was baptized, and the voice of the Father was heard, and the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, rested upon His head, we come to these words of St. John the Baptist in the Gospel concerning the Lord: *Behold the Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world!*” The thoughts I wish to share with you have been borrowed from Dr. William Barclay.

As Dr. Barclay points out: “He calls him [the Lord] by that tremendous title which has become woven into the very language of devotion – *The Lamb of God*. (Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, pg. 80, cited hereinafter as Barclay). Dr. Barclay then asks the logical question, viz., what, perhaps, was in the Baptist’s mind when he applied that title to the Lord? There are, no doubt, endless possibilities; I would like to share with you three of Dr. Barclay’s ideas.

St. John might – and most probably was – thinking of the Lord in terms of the Passover Lamb. We are reading from the first chapter of the Gospel of St. John, and the Feast of Passover will be mentioned in the following chapter. If you remember, in the days of old, the last thing that happened before Pharaoh sent the Jewish people away from Egypt – the thing that literally pushed Pharaoh “over the edge” as it were – was the Angel of Death coming to strike down all of the firstborn of man and beast in Egypt, all, except, of those whose doors were marked with the blood of the Paschal Lamb. This great horror, the result of Pharaoh’s hardness of heart, was the mighty event flinging the Jewish people out of Egypt and through the Red Sea. (Barclay, pg. 81)

Secondly, how often do we remember that St. John the Baptist was the son of a Jewish priest, Zechariah? Thus, the slaying of the lamb, which was part of the morning and evening ritual of sacrifice at the Temple in Jerusalem, would have been literally engrained in the mind and heart of John. And this morning and evening sacrifice continued until the destruction of the Temple in A.D. 70. As Barclay puts it so beautifully: “In the Temple a lamb is offered every night and every morning for the sins of the people; but in this Jesus is the only sacrifice which can deliver men from sin.” (Barclay, 81)

Thirdly, Barclay points out that there are two great pictures of the lamb in the prophets - I would suspect that there are countless others, but, for the sake of simplicity, let us stick to Barclay’s examples. In the Prophet Jeremiah we read: *But I like a gentle lamb was led to the slaughter. (Jer. 11. 19)* We find this same image in Isaiah of the Suffering Servant who was *led like a lamb to the slaughter. (Isaiah 53. 7)* It is this Suffering Servant, Who is also the meek Lamb of Sacrifice that God Our Father will, in the words of our first reading will *show forth [His] glory... to make Israel a light to the nations, that [His] salvation might reach to the ends of the earth. (Isaiah 49. 3, 6)* (Barclay, 81)

In the ancient days of the Old Testament, the blood of a lamb on a doorpost protected God’s people from the Angel of Death, allowing them to begin a trek to freedom through the Sea and the desert to a *land flowing with milk and honey*. Today we hear the words of St. John again, brought to their complete fulfillment: *Behold the Lamb of God*. The ancient Angel of Death is replaced by the out-poured Blood of the Lamb giving us true freedom and leading us, if only we allow, to the land of true freedom, the Kingdom of Heaven. The words of the collect, the opening prayer for this Holy Mass make a fitting conclusion to Barclay’s observation:

Almighty, ever-living God, Who govern all things, both in Heaven and in earth.  
Mercifully hear the pleading of your people and bestow peace on our times.  
Though Our Lord, Jesus Christ, Your Son, Who lives and reigns with You in  
the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.