



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B

Angus Dei – The Lamb of God

Readings: Daniel 12: 1-13; Ps 15, Hebrews 10:11-14, 18, Mark 13: 24-32

At the end of March, earlier this year, a group of seven young Jewish men, dressed in white, carrying a lamb and preceded by trumpeters marched towards Jerusalem. Their aim, as trainee priests of the Old Covenant, was to get as near Temple Mount as possible and enact the Passover ritual sacrifice there for the first time since the fall of the Second Temple in A.D.70.

They cannot enter Temple Mount because, for 13 centuries that has been dominated by the mosques of the conquering Muslim empire. For most other Jews the Passover sacrifice has necessarily translated into domestic celebration and synagogue visit. Yet the Passover is the great feast that has held the Jews together through all their tortured history – the remembrance that God rescued them from slavery by His sovereign power and that, the blood of the sacrificed lamb on their doorposts was what saved them from the Angel of Death. This is how they finally became His people and set out for the Promised Land.

In Jesus' time the Passover would have seen hundreds of thousands of Jews arrive in Jerusalem and the Temple would have been awash with the blood of tens of thousands of sacrificed lambs.

There are some Jews who would like to demolish the mosques and rebuild the Temple. Most understand that this would probably be a recipe for a third world war and accept the current limitations.

For Christians too the Passover remains the central feast. It was this festival that Jesus translated into the One True Eternal sacrifice of the Mass. Here the Lamb of God is offered for the sins of the people. Here the blood shed turns away the Angel of Death. Here we ascend the Holy Mountain of the Calvary to witness God's love for us, to kneel in awe, to receive the Sacred Body and the Precious Blood which is life and life eternal. Here we find our identity as His people and set out for the Promised Land. From here we are sent out into the world to bring all men to a knowledge of His saving love in Jesus. In this Mission we are fulfilling the ancient foundational promise to Abraham that, through him, all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

This is the context to which the Letter to the Hebrews is addressed.

The old order has been transformed by Jesus. The shedding of the blood of spotless creatures in sacrifice was man's right instinct to offer his best to God. That foreshadowing has now found its fulfilment in God's own final offering of His only begotten Son.

So a Christian priest does not approach the altar with a knife and a lamb. The daily offering of that sort is without meaning or purpose to us, Hebrews tells us. The Christian priest approaches the altar to re-present,

on behalf of his people, the unrepeatable sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Agnus Dei, Lamb of God.

The Christian Priest must be a man whose heart is always close to and focussed on the Sacrifice. He must be prepared to ascend the Holy Mountain, penitent and, like Aaron, with his people on his heart. Like the High Priest of old on the Day of Atonement, he will emerge from that divine and solitary encounter with the amazing authority, now given in Christ, to pronounce the words of absolution, the forgiveness of our sins. The prayers of the people, devout and utterly focussed, are the real and necessary participation in the Mass as we help one another to ascend the Holy Mountain.

Here at Mass we will glorify God for His amazing undeserved love for us
Here at Mass we will wait humbly and hungrily on His Word. What is God's will for us? How can we better follow Jesus in the next few days?

If the time constraints of the Homily leave you wanting more, never be afraid to ask the priest. One of his sacred tasks is preaching and teaching in order that his people may better follow Christ and be missionaries.

Here at the Mass we will gather up the prayers for the world with our own intentions and bring them to the altar with the gifts. This complete offering of ourselves we will place into the hands of the priest. He will ask, by the descending power of the Holy Spirit that they and we will be transformed into the Body of Christ. He will do this, as we acknowledge at the Sanctus, surrounded by the whole company of angels and saints.

He will stand with us and for us on the borderline between Heaven and Earth and reach from time into eternity. This is the holy ground on which we stand every time we come to Mass.

And we stand amazed, joyful, thankful, humble, rapt in wonder at the graciousness of our God and His astonishing love for us in Jesus and the One True Immortal sacrifice.

In the moment before the priest presents the Lamb of God to the faithful, he kneels and remembers again his own unworthiness. But he also remembers you, his people.

A Rabbinic story:

A 17th century Hasidic rabbi was famous for the power of his prayers. People flocked from all over the country to ask him to pray and many miracles were accomplished. Every week he dealt with hundreds of prayers requests. A friend asked him one day, 'Rabbi how do you find time to pray for all these people?' The Rabbi replied, 'I do it during the eighteen benedictions.' His friend was astonished. The eighteen benedictions take about three minutes. 'How is that possible?' the friend enquired.

The Rabbi replied, 'I simply stand before the Lord and say, 'Lord, look what these people have done to my heart.' It is no different for the heart of a faithful priest. It should be no different in your heart for the salvation of the world. That is, after all, the business of the Mass and the work of the Mission.