



Praying the Mass Anew

*The New Translation of The Roman Missal
and Our Actual Participation at Mass*

20. The Lamb of God and Holy Communion – Encountering Heaven on Earth.

At the conclusion of the Sign of Peace, the supplication “Lamb of God” begins as the priest breaks the host. At this moment, we focus on the altar and the Holy Eucharist seeking to more fully encounter Christ himself, who by offering the sacrifice to the Father, now offers himself to us in Holy Communion as the living bread that came down from heaven. In this moment, heaven and earth are truly being united in a visible and supernatural way.

In the hymn “Lamb of God” there are **no changes** in the text of the new translation. The words themselves are based on those of John the Baptist, who in seeing Jesus approach, proclaims “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). His title for Jesus, “Lamb of God,” contains both the allusion to the Passover sacrifice of the “unblemished lamb” and the prophecy of Isaiah 53, who prophesies that he will be “like a lamb led to the slaughter.” Furthermore, the Book of Revelation testifies to the “lamb that seemed to have been slain” to whom all worship and honor is given.

In this proclamation of “Lamb of God” and our final preparation for Holy Communion, several beautiful meanings are present. At one and the same moment we proclaim the Lamb of God in heaven,

who was “broken” for us in his saving sacrifice, and the Lamb of God who is “re-presented” for us in the Eucharist. Our proclamation places us in an encounter with Christ in his sacrifice at Calvary as the true Lamb, now worshiped and glorified with the Father and the Holy Spirit by the saints in heaven. Simply put, all time (past, present, and future glory) are present as one. As the supplication “Lamb of God” is sung, the priest prepares for Holy Communion by breaking the host, placing a small piece in the chalice (this act is explained in the *Questions of the Week*.) In addition, he prays that his own reception of communion may be fruitful. While the breaking or “fractioning” of the host contains great meaning and is to be carried out in reverence, nonetheless it is not meant to draw undue attention to itself.

For, at the conclusion of the fractioning and the “Lamb of God,” the priest genuflects, then takes part of the broken host and presents it (he may hold it over the chalice, or simply over the paten [the plate with hosts]). He echoes John the Baptist in proclaiming the Lamb of God, and joins in the response of the people to the Lamb. Below is the new translation of these words.

Priest:

Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away
the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called
to the supper of the Lamb.

All:

**Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.**

- The new translations of these texts are very faithful to biblical sources:
 - John 1:29 – “Behold, the Lamb of God.”
 - Revelation 19:9 – The angel proclaims “Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”
 - Luke 7:6-7 – The centurion says to Jesus, “Lord...I am not worthy to have you come under my roof...”
- “The supper of the Lamb:” These words connect us to heaven’s worship – at Mass, we participate in heaven on earth.
- “Under my roof:” Not literally the “roof” of our mouth; perhaps can be thought of in reference to our bodies as “temples,” where God desires to make his dwelling.
- “My soul:” The Eucharist is truly food for the soul – in need of healing from sin and its effects.

Of particular note in the new translation is the fidelity to the biblical sources of all these words. What is equally important is the clearer expression of humility that the new translation yields – that we are not worthy of the Eucharist. Yet, God in his mercy still offers us himself so that our souls may be healed.

When the time comes to approach the Eucharist, we receive the Lamb of God who takes away sins and brings us to everlasting life. Hence, when we receive

Holy Communion, as in times past, we give our assent through our “amen.” This “amen” is an expression not only of faith in the Eucharist, but a humble profession of Catholic faith and a full assent to the whole truth that God has revealed and that the Church proposes for belief. Proper reception of the Eucharist places us in communion with Christ and all the saints in heaven, through his sacrifice. Indeed how blessed we are to be called to the true supper of the Lamb.

Questions of the Week:

➤ ***When we sing the Lamb of God, is it acceptable to use other titles, such as “Jesus, Prince of Peace?”***
Many know music settings for the “Lamb of God” wherein each verse begins with a different title for Jesus. In truth, the only acceptable words are those of the given text itself: “Lamb of God.” GIRM #83 says that this given line “may be repeated as many times as necessary until the rite (of fractioning the hosts) has reached its conclusion, the last time ending with the words ‘grant us peace.’” It does not allow changing these first words. Accordingly, whether the supplication is sung three or more times, it is always initiated with the words “Lamb of God.”

➤ ***Why does the priest put part of the host in the chalice?***

Part of the ritual of fractioning the Eucharist involves the priest taking a small part of the broken host and placing it in the chalice. This act, called the “fermentum,” has two different explanations, both symbolizing unity. One is symbolic of unity in the Church. An ancient custom was the entrusting of small pieces of the host from the Mass of the bishop to deacons, who brought them to the local priests. A piece of host was placed in the chalice of each priest offering Mass, as a sign of unity with the bishop. The other meaning concerns unity in the sacrifice itself. In dying on the cross, as the Lord’s body was pierced and blood and hence they were separated. In the Mass, the Body and Blood of Christ are offered separately (as at the Last Supper), but as one sacrifice. Hence, the priest says these words as he places the small piece of host in the chalice: “May this mingling of the Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ bring eternal life to us who receive it.” These words call to mind the separation and the union within the sacrifice, or in other words it calls to mind both Christ’s death and bodily resurrection to new life.