

Rev. Paul A. Hottinger

“Behold, the Lamb of God” Days of Christmas Saturday, January 4, 2014 8:15 AM
1 Jn 3:7-10; **Jn 1:35-42** St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, religious (Lamb for food and protection; Yahweh to show mercy and to avenge evil)

The readings this morning are very rich, especially this gospel: **“Behold, the Lamb of God.”**

We know the gospels were **written originally in Greek, and yet they often reflect usages that are either Hebrew or Aramaic**, since presumably Jesus himself spoke on a regular basis Aramaic—that was the vernacular of that time—and probably understood Hebrew, at least he could read it since Scripture says he read scrolls in the synagogue, and they were written in Hebrew. So that would go also for the disciples; they had some knowledge of Hebrew, and Aramaic was there vernacular. So **there’s a play on words very often.**

Here the play is the word “lamb” in Hebrew. Hebrew has a very small vocabulary, so words have many different meanings. On top of that, until way after the time of Christ, Hebrew was never written with any vowel signs, only consonants. Well, think about English. How **many different words have the very same consonants?** Lots of words. So this allows authors to play on words. And this was a very favorite device. **So “lamb” and “lad” are the same word in Hebrew.** “Look, there is the Lamb of God” is the same as “Look, there is the lad of God,” the youth of God. So here is Jesus as a young man. He is the youth of God; he is the Lamb of God.

Now the word “lamb” of course only takes on meaning once you understand what his role is. The disciples at this time, or these people becoming disciples, could not have had any idea what “lamb” would mean. **The term “lamb” in the history of the Israelite religion refers primarily to Passover.** Lambs were not used in the temple sacrifices; those were goats or bulls or for poor people pigeons. But lamb, the lamb was used in the Passover, and it had two purposes. First of all, **it was eaten for the journey**; it was food for the journey. But secondly, **the blood was used to protect.** It was put on the lintels of the tents as protection—against what? Against the vengeance of Yahweh. **In the Old Testament, Yahweh, the**

Lord, has two primary purposes: to show mercy and to avenge evil—both. Modern people often only look at one side or the other, but there are both, always both.

Now **Jesus is the Son of the Most High, Yahweh, in the flesh. So he has got both too, both mercy and vengeance.** Now we don't see any vengeance in the earthly life of Jesus. We see only the mercy. But Christians always believed that when he comes the second time he will avenge the injustices of the world, and he will not mind that. Some people think of Jesus overly sweetly. No, Jesus is utterly godly, **perfectly balanced** and, therefore, has utter mercy to the point that he is willing to shed his own blood to protect those who believe in him and accept him and become his disciples and follow his way. **He will shed his own blood to protect** them, but those who reject him and his ways and who act evilly, as was referred to in the first reading, who are really children of the devil, who want to be children of the devil, and **who identify with the works of the devil, those he will definitely destroy.** And he will have no problem doing it. It's not as if he is squeamish. He has everything. He is perfectly balanced.

So here the “Lamb of God,” the “Lad of God”—John points him out. And these **disciples** follow immediately, called by something more than just a statement; **the Holy Spirit is already drawing them** into the sphere of Jesus, the reign of God, the power of the Light. And of course they are willing to be drawn, naturally. God doesn't pull anybody against their will. **They already have some sort of desire for something.** They probably don't even know what or could say what it is, but they have a desire for something. And it's associated with this word “Messiah.” Now they didn't know what that meant. It means anointed, but they didn't know what it meant. It was the word they used to refer to what they were expecting, something, the help from above, what we would today call “salvation,” although they probably wouldn't use that word. Redemption, renewal, rebirth—they didn't use those words; they didn't know what they meant. But they were looking for something.

And today this continues. **Those that are looking for something are drawn by the Holy Spirit to Jesus,** who is the anointed one. And he is “Lamb of God,” and he will protect them from the wrath to come. And those who reject this whole way of life and meaning of everything?