



**Step-by-Step Walk Through the Mass  
Do This in Remembrance of Me, Part 64,  
Lamb of God  
by FR. LUKE SPANNAGEL**



Continuing through the Communion Rite, we have prayed the Our Father and exchanged a holy and reverent Sign of Peace. What comes next? As *The General Instruction of the Roman Missal* explains, “The gesture of breaking bread done by Christ at the Last Supper, which in apostolic times gave the entire Eucharistic Action its name [Breaking of the Bread was a common name for Mass in the early Church], signifies that the many faithful are made one body (1 Cor 10:17) by receiving Communion from the one Bread of Life, which is Christ, who for the salvation of the world died and rose again. The fraction or breaking of bread is begun after the sign of peace and is carried out with proper reverence, and should not be unnecessarily prolonged or accorded exaggerated importance... The priest breaks the Bread and puts a piece of the host into the chalice to signify the unity of the Body and Blood of the Lord in the work of salvation, namely, of the Body of Jesus Christ, living and glorious” (*GIRM*, 83).

### **The Lamb of God in Scripture**

You may be thinking, *Hold on, Father! What about the Lamb of God?* Well, as we will see, at this moment of the Mass a couple of actions will be overlapping. At this point in the Mass, we either sing or say the *Agnus Dei*: “Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us. Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.” The *Roman Missal* instructs that the first phrases may be repeated if needed, but the final time always ends with “grant us peace.” As John the Baptist heralded, Jesus is the Lamb of God—the one true sacrifice offered out of love for us for the forgiveness of sins. As the Diocese of Peoria teaches, “The slaughtered lamb is of extreme importance throughout Sacred Scripture. The prophecy of Jeremiah is that the suffering Servant of the Lord would be like a ‘lamb led to the slaughter.’ The Book of Revelation states that enthroned on the Heavenly Altar is the Lamb of God showing the marks of being slain for our offenses. For the Jewish Passover, the lamb was the prescribed animal of sacrifice. The sacrifice of Jesus is the new Passover. In fact, as the Gospel of John details, Jesus is the Lamb of the new Passover” (*A Study of the Mass*, p. 18).

### **The Meaning of the Lamb of God**

In greater depth, Charles Belmonte states, “The figure of the ‘Lamb of God’ is full of meaning and is helpful to enkindle our devotion before Communion. The Lamb foretold by Isaiah and announced by St. John the Baptist should wipe out our sins through his obedience to God’s will: ‘Innocent, he never opened his mouth, like a lamb that is led to the slaughterhouse, like a sheep that is dumb before its shearers’ (Isa 53:7)... [T]his lamb was also foreshadowed by the paschal lamb the Jews sacrificed on the eve of their departure from their slavery in Egypt. The expression of John the Baptist reminds us of the lamb of which the Jews celebrated the Passover every year, the pledge of the reconciliation of man with God. St. John the Evangelist, who was at the foot of the cross, observed that Jesus’ legs were not broken as in the case of the two thieves. We find in this detail some similarity with the prescription of God for the Paschal lamb: ‘You must not break any bone of it’ (Ex 12:46) ... Finally, the *Agnus Dei* [Lamb of God] is also a nuptial hymn to celebrate the wedding of the Lamb with his bride, the Church, in peace and unity, as is described in the Book of Revelation. There, on the altar, the Lamb lies alive, but as if slain. Twenty-four elders are around the Lamb. They are clothed in white robes and crowned with gold. Thousands of angels hymn the sacrifice and triumph of the Lamb. Certainly, each Mass is only a prelude and a token of the future adoration of the Lamb in eternity” (*Understanding the Mass*, p. 180–81).

So, just like so many of the other Mass parts we have reviewed, the Lamb of God is filled with meaning and symbolism, all of which are pointing directly to Jesus Christ, truly present on the altar: his Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity. Just before we are ready for Holy Communion, these words remind us of Who is present on the altar and that, in his great love, he offered himself in sacrifice to save us from our sins. Here is the One who fulfills the prophecies of old. Here is the One for whom hearts have been longing. Here is the One whose perfect sacrifice draws us together in love and opens a sharing in the beauty and perfection of heaven. What a great Savior! How blessed are we that he is truly present in our midst!