

Sunday Homily

Title Homily on Lion or Lamb?

Date: January 18, 2026

Sunday: 2nd Sunday of the Year (A cycle)

Scripture: John 1:29-34

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Text: John the Baptist calls Jesus *the Lamb of God*. Because we repeat the expression at every Mass, it does not strike us as unusual. Step back, however, and ask: who calls an adult male a lamb? The evangelist John tried other images for Jesus. In the last book in the Bible, the Book of Revelation, John calls Jesus *the Lion of Judah*. Even so, John's Revelation proclaims the victory over sin and death as the Victory of the Lamb. Here's today's question: does Jesus as the Lamb of God make any difference to us?

Contemporary philosopher Emmanuel Falque published a three-volume work on this topic. His ideas work like this: He imagines three types of animals: the predator beast—lions, tigers, and bears; the gentle, herd animal—cows and lambs; AND the human animal. Most animals live by pre-programmed instinct. The human animal is the only creature that constructs a life as we go through life. We must decide how to live. We can be predator-beasts or gentle herd-like animals. Or we can aspire to higher forms of interaction.

Our faith reveals our highest aspiration. The human aspires to unite with divinity. The Lamb of God is one example: the image unites the animal with the divine. The just-celebrated feast of Christmas is another; the divine spirit unites with human flesh. It makes a difference. Consider how often we use the word *peace* in Christmas week; the unity of divinity and humanity keeps the dream alive. Eucharist, the Mass, is another. We take into our bodies the Body and Blood of Christ. Consider how the gift of the Lord's Body and Blood inspires us to give.

Our faith encompasses our reality: body and soul, the spiritual and material, the human animal and the divine spirit. The result changes the way we live.

The Gospel today suggests how God pulls us upward, away from the predator-beast and out from the herd. The Baptist tells us he saw the Holy Spirit as an animal—a bird, a dove—descend on Jesus. Right away, he tells us that Jesus baptizes us with the same Spirit. Because the divine embraces humanity, humanity can aspire and hope. Baptism tugs us upward to a higher form of life.

Images like the Lamb of God and the dove-as-God's-Spirit inform us that God saves the entirety of our lives, body and soul, the material and spiritual. The faith demands a decision.

[Will we accept the salvation that is offered? Which translates: How do we want to live life?] Theologians call this choice *the fundamental option*. We can choose the predator-beasts, can join the pushing and shoving, approving violence, trying domination. We can join the herd, going along to get along, letting others manipulate us. Or we can aspire to what Jesus reveals as our best self, the self that unites with Him and through Him with God the Father.

Even after we decide, the construction of our lives continues; it is difficult, a lifetime building project. If we choose to be one with Christ, then, the issue becomes **authenticity**, whether we belong to Christ in every aspect of our lives. A couple quick examples: Faith-filled politics asks us to factor into our positions the common good along with our self-interest. We all know how difficult it is to think beyond the self. Faith-filled economics asks us to think about biblical justice, how the economy should offer every person the means for a good life. We know how Christ asks us to love those close to us. But God creates all humankind: the faith demands

we look for the goodness when we relate to others, especially those who differ. Authenticity requires us to achieve our aspirations in the whole of our lives.

The Lamb of God has one more dimension to it that may give us the courage to choose Christ. The lamb factors into the Lord's crucifixion. The entire passion of the Lord is in the context of Passover. The Lamb of God reminds us of the Passover supper during which a lamb is the main course. John the evangelist makes the time and day of the crucifixion coincide with the sacrifice of the Passover Lambs in the temple. The Passover feast is about God's action to liberate God's people from slavery. God's liberation met Israel's aspiration in every way imaginable: it was political liberation from Pharaoh's oppression. It was economic liberation; God's people wanted their own land to farm. It was religious freedom; the former slaves dreamed of the God of justice who confers human dignity at creation. The Evangelist also recalls the Passover Lamb because Jesus expands freedom. Jesus sets us free from sin and death. Therefore, humanity can soar, can aspire to the highest form of life. God liberates us so we can construct our lives.

Right before Holy Communion, we invoke the Lamb of God three times. The priest proclaims the Lamb of God one more time. Jesus came to us in-the-flesh so we human animals can unite with God by receiving His Body and Blood. Say *Amen* to new life in Christ.