

Catechesis on the Revised Mass Texts: BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

As we are invited to participate in communion you will hear the priest say:

*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.*

'Behold' connects with the biblical passage where the disciples first encounter Jesus. John the Baptist intentionally points Jesus out to his own disciples saying to them, here he is, look at him, pay attention.

This translation brings out the movement of our prayer at this significant moment in the liturgy. The priest holds the host in front of us so that we can deliberately gaze as those first disciples did. The word 'behold' invites us to gaze upon the Saviour with loving regard as we prepare ourselves to receive him.

In the translation we are using now the priest continues this invitation by saying 'Happy are those called to his Supper', this will change to a more accurate translation using the biblical word 'blessed'.

This is a stronger word than happy connecting with the whole notion of being made holy, those who are called to this banquet are made holy by taking part in it and this is the primary meaning of being blessed.

This is more evident when connected with the full phrase which is directly taken from Chapter 19 of the book of Revelation where the Lamb's Supper is a marriage feast. Jesus often spoke of this in his parables in relation to the great celebration in heaven.

In the book of Revelation this marriage feast is described as a marriage between Christ and the People of God: the Church.

The moment of communion is seen as a foretaste of this eternal banquet, so that even now we are beginning to experience the union which we will share forever with God.

Our liturgical response to this invitation will also change so that from November we will say:

Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof where we have been saying *Lord, I am not worthy to receive you.*

The revised text connects more strongly with the biblical imagery in the passage that inspired this prayer found in the gospel of Matthew chapter 8. This phrase occurs in the story where the centurion speak to Jesus as he visits his sick servant.

In the middle ages when a priest visited a house hold to visit the sick this was the phrase that was used in prayer. This prayer is not about the roof of a house, or even as some have suggested the roof of the mouth! It expresses in poetic form our sense of unworthiness in the presence of so great a guest.

When I say this prayer with others before communion, each of us is acknowledging that no one is worthy and that when we come before the Lord we come as sinners in need of the healing touch of Jesus, the same healing touch experienced by the centurion and his servant.

This week you could reflect on the following:

- *When the host is held up at Mass do you take time to gaze and give your full attention to the Lord?*
- *In what way do you want to take your full place at the wedding feast of the eucharist?*
- *How do you express your need for healing as you prepare for communion?*