

3rd Sunday of Easter (C)¹

Homily – St. Benedict’s Parish

17/18 April 2010

“Follow me.”²

Let’s go for a walk. (I’ve got to burn off calories from Fr. Paul’s Steak Roast yesterday anyway!)

But remember we Catholic Christians never walk alone.³

We move together

-like a school of large fish⁴

-like a flock of loveable sheep⁵

-like the Pilgrim People of God⁶

We “walk by faith” together.⁷

[while walking to the middle of the church]

Let’s walk to the walls and windows of this amazing temple⁸ first.

We are literally surrounded by lambs here.

Look...high above the choir loft at the point of our great Gothic window...there is the Lamb from the Book of Revelation with seven seals under it.⁹ Make sure you take a look after Mass if you can’t see it now.

Likewise, under our tabernacle there is a Lamb carved in marble,

And, there, in the beautiful transept window of Mary under her is a Lamb. Mary had a little lamb after all!¹⁰

But, I can hear you say, “Deacon Bill, you said we were surrounded by lambs...what about that side?”¹¹

Well, of course, you are ahead of me theologically again!

Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.¹²

Yes, we are surrounded by lambs here.

[while walking to the ambo]

Let’s walk to the ambo together.

Just like our church is surrounded by Lambs, so the Church surrounds us with the Book of Revelation during the Easter Season this year.¹³ It is the Second Reading all the way to Pentecost. You heard from it last week too.¹⁴

¹ A look “behind the scenes” of the development of this homily was blogged at <http://stbenedictsamherstnyblog.blogspot.com/2010/04/homily-3rd-sunday-easter-c.html>.

² John 21:19. From today’s Gospel pericope.

³ Liverpool FC’s motto and the popular song it is based on were on my mind here!

⁴ See John 21:11. From today’s Gospel pericope.

⁵ See John 21:15-18. From today’s Gospel pericope – long form proclaimed at all Masses.

⁶ From Vatican II documents. See *Gaudium et Spes*, 57 as one example of many - *Christians, on pilgrimage toward the heavenly city, should seek and think of these things which are above*. From page of Pilgrim Church quotes maintained by [Gerald W. Schlabach](mailto:gwschlabach@stthomas.edu), gwschlabach@stthomas.edu. Accessed 19 April 2010.

⁷ See 2 Cor. 5:7; we sang the hymn “We Walk by Faith” at most Masses last weekend; and the phrase was used in the parish Facebook post (4:40 pm 18 April 2010) recapping this weekend’s liturgy.

⁸ I wanted to use “temple,” rather than “church” for its Jewish sacrificial locus and the Revelation point that no temple is found in the New and Eternal Jerusalem. In other words, we here are a pilgrim people, a *parish*, etymologically considered.

⁹ See Revelation 6:1. See Supplements for photos of windows

¹⁰ This American poem did not have a religious meaning originally; I am using it here simply as a memory device.

¹¹ Pointing to the west transept window of Jesus.

¹² See John 1:29.

¹³ Liturgical Year C.

¹⁴ See Revelation 1:9-11a; 12-13; 17-19. Last Sunday’s Second Reading.

The word “revelation” comes from Latin and it means to unveil.¹⁵
Sometimes the Book of Revelation” is called “The Apocalypse.” The word “apocalypse” comes from Greek and it too means to unveil.¹⁶

Remember in Matthew, Mark and Luke’s Gospels?
When Jesus dies on the cross, they say that the veil, the curtain,
in the sanctuary of the Temple in Jerusalem was torn in two from top to bottom.¹⁷
In other words, everyone can see God now, not just the high priest.

That’s what the Book of Revelation, or the Apocalypse, does. It lets us see into heaven a bit.

It’s a fascinating Book to read. Don’t be afraid of it or saddened by it.

Yes, it’s the Book with
-the Beast... and 666¹⁸
-and the Whore of Babylon¹⁹
-and the Battle of Armageddon²⁰
-and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse²¹
-and the Dragon and its angels.²²

But these are the bit players in the Book;
The star is the Lamb.

Those who worship the Lamb, those who robes have been washed in the Blood of the Lamb,²³ are heroes in this Book.

It’s the Book that reminds us that Christians win in the end.

It’s also the only Book of the New Testament that mentions that great Easter word – Alleluia!
Only the Book of Psalms uses “Alleluia” in the Hebrew Scriptures, and only Revelation uses it in the New.
Remember that famous phrase of St. Augustine: “we are an Easter people and Alleluia is our song!”²⁴

Alleluia means “praise God!”²⁵

That’s what we are doing here at Mass – praising God!

We join the countless number of angels, the saints, the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures and all of creation here and now praising God.²⁶

¹⁵ Oxford English Dictionary, etymology of *reveal* - [< Anglo-Norman and Middle French *reveler*, Middle French *reveller* (French *révéler*) to disclose or communicate (something) by divine or supernatural means (first half of the 12th cent. in Anglo-Norman), to disclose or make known (something previously unknown or kept secret) in speech or writing (second half of the 12th cent.), to show oneself, make oneself visible or apparent (second half of the 12th cent. in Anglo-Norman) and its etymon classical Latin *revelāre* to remove the covering from, unveil, to raise the lid of, open, to unmask, to divulge, in post-classical Latin also to explain, to manifest (with reference to divine revelation) (late 2nd or early 3rd cent. in Tertullian) < *re-* *RE-* prefix + *velare* to cover (see *VEIL* v.). Compare Old Occitan *revelar* (end of the 13th cent.), Catalan *revelar* (13th cent.), Spanish *revelar* (second half of the 12th cent.), Portuguese *revelar* (13th cent.), Italian *rivelare* (second half of the 13th cent.; first half of the 13th cent. as *revelare*). Compare *REVEIL* v.]

¹⁶ Oxford English Dictionary, etymology of *apocalypse* - [ad. L. *apocalypsis*, a. Gr. ἀποκάλυψις, n. of action f. ἀποκαλύπτειν to uncover, disclose, f. ἀπό off + καλύπτειν to cover.]

¹⁷ See Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38 and Luke 23:45, respectively.

¹⁸ See Revelation 13:11-18.

¹⁹ See Revelation 17:1-15.

²⁰ See Revelation 16:16.

²¹ See Revelation 6:1-8.

²² See Revelation 22:1-18.

²³ See Revelation 7:14; next Sunday’s Second Reading.

²⁴ However, I still cannot track down any actual writing of Augustine that uses this.

²⁵ See Oxford English Dictionary, etymology of *alleluia* - [a. L. *Allel̄ia*, a. Gr. ἀλληλούια, the Septuagint representation of Heb. הללו יה *hallelu-ya*, i.e. praise ye Jah or Jehovah, now more commonly written as in the A.V. of the O.T., HALLELUJAH.]

²⁶ The *Ghent Altarpiece* came to mind – “Adoration of the Lamb” by Jan van Eyck, 1432. See Supplements.

We are with them.

We've entered into the heavenly mysteries, the sacraments,²⁷ we've opened the door to the sacred.²⁸

We give all good things to God and to the Lamb today – power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor and glory and strength!²⁹
But what's with all the Lamb talk in Revelation? Why does this short Book use the word “lamb” 29 times?³⁰

[walking behind the altar]

Let's walk together to the altar.³¹

The Jewish priests in Old Testament times offered animals for sacrifice. The word “priest” by the way, comes from the Greek word “presbyter,” meaning elder.³² Note that the elders were there leading worship in our Second Reading today too.³³

The lamb was the most commonly sacrificed animal. They especially looked for a spotless, first born, male lamb.³⁴

The lamb was killed and its blood poured out.

It was then burned.

The idea seemed to have been that, as the smoke rose, God “took” the offering and received the sacrifice.

The lamb died and disappeared.

By the way, incense is often used in sacrificial religion too because it imitates this act –
God takes the smoke, and all that is left is worthless ash.

Early on, Jesus was called the Lamb of God.

Remember that John the Baptist called him that.³⁵

We already called Jesus the “Lamb of God” today in the Gloria.³⁶

Soon we will sing the Lamb of God and realize again that Jesus is the one, final, acceptable sacrifice to God the Father.³⁷

Here at the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass, Jesus' offering of Himself is re-presented.

He is both the priest and the Lamb of sacrifice.³⁸

²⁷ See Oxford English Dictionary, partial etymology of *sacrament* - In Christian Latin from the 3rd century the word was the accepted rendering of Gr. μυστήριον MYSTERY¹. This use is evidently not based on either of the specific applications above mentioned, but is the result of a recourse to the etymological meaning. In early Christian language *sacramentum* and the synonymous μυστήριον were applied indiscriminately to any ritual observance of the Church, or to any spiritually symbolic act or object; but they were also often applied in an eminent sense to the two most important observances, baptism and the Lord's Supper or Eucharist.

²⁸ See *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church*, Revised and Updated Edition, by Joseph Martos; Liguori/Triumph: Liguori, Missouri, 2001. The phrase “doors to the sacred” appears on page 7 in context of Mircea Eliade's “hierophanies.”

²⁹ See Revelation 5:12 from today's Second Reading.

³⁰ Count (lamb and lamb's) from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson Publishers; Nashville: Tennessee, 1979. (KJV).

³¹ See *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, [translation of *Einführung in den Geist der Liturgie*] Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 2000 by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI), page 38 – *The Apocalypse presents this sacrificed Lamb, who lives as sacrificed, as the center of the heavenly liturgy, a liturgy that, through Christ's Sacrifice, is now present in the midst of the world and makes replacement liturgies superfluous (see Rev 5)*. This idea permeates my words at the altar.

³² See Oxford English Dictionary, partial etymology of *priest* - Etymologically *priest* represents Greek πρεσβύτερος, Latin *presbyter*, ELDER *n.*¹; but by the late 2nd or early 3rd cent. A.D. (Tertullian), and thus long before the Latin or Romance word was taken into English, the Latin word *sacerdos*, originally, like Greek ιερεύς, applied to the sacrificing priests of the heathen gods, and also, in the translations of the Scriptures, to the Jewish priests, had come to be applied to the Christian ministers also, and thus to be a synonym of *presbyter* (compare SACERDOS *n.*).

³³ See Revelation 5:14.

³⁴ See Leviticus 1:10.

³⁵ See John 1:29.

³⁶ See *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development - Missarum Sollemnia*, (Vol. II) Joseph Jungmann, SJ, Benzinger: NY, 1955 for the liturgical uses of the words “Lamb of God,” particularly page 338 on the Agnus Dei itself: *Thus a hymn developed, short in its wording but impressive in its import, capable (especially within the limits in which it appears) of being compared to the hymns of the Apocalypse*.

³⁷ See Hebrews 10:11-28.

³⁸ See *Preface* Easter III, used at all Masses: *Father, all-powerful and ever-living God, we do well always and everywhere to give you thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. We praise you with greater joy than ever in this Easter season, when Christ became our paschal sacrifice. He is still our priest, our advocate who always pleads our cause. Christ is the victim who dies no more, the Lamb once slain, who lives forever*.

But unlike the lambs of old which died and disappeared, our Lamb lives and appears!³⁹
We eat His Body and drink His Blood. He lives and appears among us. He is our Paschal Feast,⁴⁰ the Lamb of sacrifice and the Passover Lamb.

[walking to the center aisle right before the altar.]

One more place on our walk together...
Here is the last place our bodies will be in St. Benedict's.
Years from now - not for a long, long time, I hope, -- our caskets will be placed here.
But don't be saddened or frightened by the end;
Just like you shouldn't be frightened or saddened by the end of the New Testament – the Book of Revelation.

Of course, as humans, we are always saddened and frightened by death,
but remember the lesson of the Lamb today! The end, death, is when you USE your faith!

When you suffer rejection or misunderstanding for your belief
Rejoice that you were found worthy to suffer for the sake of the Name.⁴¹
When illness, pain, disease, cancer or Alzheimer's strikes
Realize that you are living the life of the Lamb.
When death seems to be the end
Look again. See Jesus the Lamb once slain who lives still.

See, heaven is ours.

Our faith is the faith of the Risen One, the Lamb of God who suffered, died and rose for us.
His yoke is easy and His burden light.⁴²
Our faith teaches that the last shall be first.⁴³
The lowly, exalted.⁴⁴
The hungry, filled.⁴⁵
The sad, comforted.⁴⁶

Heaven is ours, thanks to the Lamb!

In this very spot, a final, beautiful, prayer is said for us. Let's end our journey with it.
It comes from the Book of Revelation:

*May the angels lead you into Paradise;
May the martyrs come to welcome you
And take you to the holy city,
the new and eternal Jerusalem*⁴⁷

And
*may the grace of the Lord Jesus be with (you) all.*⁴⁸

³⁹ See John 21:14 from today's Gospel pericope.

⁴⁰ We used Penitential Rite C today. Invocations:
Jesus, you are the Lamb of God – Lord have mercy;
You take away the sins of the world – Christ have mercy;
You invite us to the Paschal Feast – Lord, have mercy.

⁴¹ See Acts 5:41 from today's First Reading.

⁴² See Matthew 11:30.

⁴³ See Luke 13:30.

⁴⁴ See Luke 1:48.

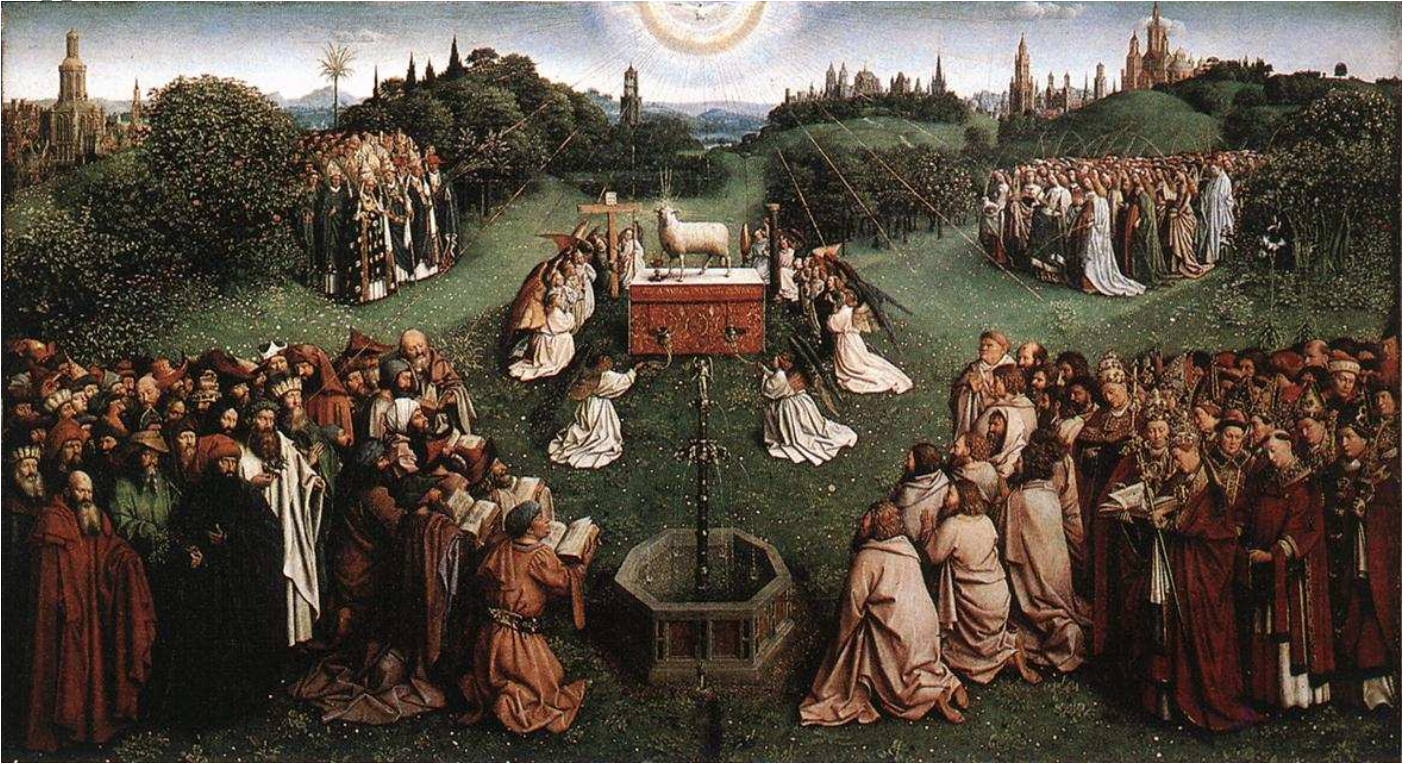
⁴⁵ See Luke 1:53.

⁴⁶ See Matthew 5:4.

⁴⁷ In Paradisum, *Rite of Funerals*, Final Commendation and Farewell: 50, antiphon A. See Revelation 21:9-26.

⁴⁸ Revelation 22:21 (NAB). The final words of the Book of Revelation.

Supplements



Ghent Altarpiece
The Adoration of the Lamb
Completed by Jan van Eyck, 1432

Following photos courtesy of Fr. Paul Sabo:



Revelation Lamb under Tabernacle
St. Benedict's Church



**Revelation Lamb in Gothic choir window
St. Benedict's Church**



**Lamb under transept window of Mary
St. Benedict's Church**