

Behold Your Mother

John 17-19

What We Found

The Hour came, and we overheard the prayer: Father, glorify thy Son... for their sake I consecrate myself, the priest consecrating the victim, and the victim was himself. In a garden, hunted by men carrying lamps to find the Light of the world, he asked the Gospel's oldest question, whom do you seek, and answered their answer with the final I AM, and a cohort of armed men fell to the ground. Nothing was taken from him tonight; everything was laid down. While he said I AM inside, Peter said I am not, twice, beside a charcoal fire, and the cock crowed exactly on schedule, and John, in mercy, recorded no tears.

Then the clock we had watched for thirteen weeks struck. The accusers would not defile themselves, for they had yet to eat the passover, and on the reading the Church has long drawn from John, the lambs were not yet slain. It was the day of Preparation, about the sixth hour, noon, with the Temple slaughter still to come, and the only other sixth hour in this Gospel, when a tired man once asked a woman at a well for a drink. Behold your King, said Pilate; we have no king but Caesar, said the priests, on the day the lambs died. From the cross he gave us his mother: Woman, behold your son... behold your mother, the Woman of Cana standing at the far end of the Hour, and the disciple, unnamed, in whose place the Church has always invited us to stand, took her into his own. He said I thirst, and the sponge came up on hyssop, the branch that painted the doorposts with lamb's blood at the first Passover. He said *tetelestai*, it is finished, the completion of he loved them to the end. And they broke no bone of him, as Exodus 12:46 commands for the Passover lamb, John himself citing the rubric, and from his opened side came blood and water, the font and the chalice, the Church born from the side of the sleeping second Adam.

And we opened our guesses. Thirteen weeks sealed, and the answer had been at every Mass of our lives: the Baptist's cry, three Passovers, a flesh that must be eaten because the Passover lamb was never merely slain but eaten (Exodus 12:8), Isaiah's lamb led to the slaughter, Abraham's answer to Isaac, God will provide himself the lamb, the sixth hour, the hyssop, the unbroken bones. And at every elevation, forever: Behold the Lamb of God... blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb. The bridegroom of Cana, the bride wooed at a well, the Church born from the opened side, and the wedding feast announced over every altar on earth. The Lamb is not merely beheld. He is eaten. And Nicodemus, who first came by night, came in daylight with a hundred pounds of royal spices, and buried his King in a garden.

Voices of the Church

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Melito of Sardis, On the Pascha (2nd century)

Within a lifetime of the beloved disciple's death, Melito preached the oldest surviving Easter homily: it is he who was the Passover of our salvation; he was led like a lamb and slain like a sheep; he ransomed us from the slavery of the world as from the land of Egypt. The lamb of Exodus was the sketch; the Lord is the portrait, and when the portrait arrives the sketch has done its work.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. Augustine of Hippo, Tractates on the Gospel of John, Tractate 120

The first Adam slept, and from his side God formed the woman; the second Adam slept upon the cross, and from his side flowed the blood and water from which his Bride, the Church, is formed. The spear, Augustine notes, did not merely strike the side but opened it, as one opens a door, and through that opened door flow the sacraments.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH: St. John Paul II, Redemptoris Mater

The disciple took her *eis ta idia*, into his own: not merely into his house, but into everything that makes up his inner life. The entrusting from the cross is mutual: the Mother given to the disciple, the disciple to the Mother, and because he stands unnamed, every disciple whom Jesus loves is invited into the same exchange. The pope whose motto was *Totus tuus* lived this entrusting as his own, and taught us to do the same.

Live It This Week

- **Behold, knowing everything.** This Sunday, when the priest raises the Host before Communion and says Behold the Lamb of God, behold: look at the Host with everything you now know, and make your Lord, I am not worthy the most honest sentence of your week. Then go to the supper of the Lamb.
- **Take her into your own.** Every day this week, pray the Memorare, or one decade of the Rosary, as your act of accepting the bequest of John 19:27. She was given to you from the cross; a week of daily hello is the least a son or daughter can do.
- **Ten minutes at the foot.** Once this week, sit before a crucifix and read John 19:25-37 slowly at its foot. Stop at the hyssop, stop at it is finished, stop at the opened side. You have never read it as the person you are now.

Memory Verse

MEMORIZE AGAIN: John 1:29 (RSV2CE)

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!

You memorized this verse in Week Two, when it was a mystery. Say it every day this week, now that it is not. They are the same words; you are not the same reader.

Before Next Session

Read John 20 and 21. Session 14: That You May Believe, our final session. It begins before dawn, in the garden. Bring nothing but yourselves.

Catechism References

CCC 608, 766, 964, 1225, 2560, 2605.