When John speaks of Christ in his gospel, he uses powerful imagery and phrases we have become familiar with such as “the Word became flesh” and “the Light came into the world”. But no image carries greater power than today’s: “The Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.” We hear it at every single Mass and you’re going to hear it again today. Holding up the Body and Blood, the priest says: “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb…” and all respond accordingly. I thought we might look at the origin of this title for Christ. It’ll take us to the Passover supper, the Jewish celebration – the **same** celebration Jesus and his disciples were observing in the upper room the night before his crucifixion. (Jesus sends his disciples to a house to tell them the Master has need of the upper room, and there, to prepare the Passover meal.) During the meal Christ institutes the Lord’s Supper which we celebrate today. Volumes have been written regarding the “bridge between the two” -from Passover to Lord’s Supper and the symbolism contained in it.

Let’s quickly revisit some background: The very first time the Passover Supper was celebrated takes us all the way back to Egypt to the land of Goshen where the 12 tribes of Israel lived, and the night before they were freed from slavery. (Remember, the 12 tribes stemmed from the 12 sons of Jacob). Jacob and his sons moved to Egypt to escape a famine, over many years the families were prolific and to keep them under control, the Egyptians put them into slavery and now tension between them and Pharaoh has reached its boiling point. God tells Moses to set his people free and lead them back to the promised land of Canaan from whence Jacob and his sons had come. Moses says, “Let my people
go”. Pharaoh says “No way- ain’t gonna do it”. God sends the 10 plagues on Egypt. The final one, along with the Passover, celebrated for the first time, occur on the same night. God tells Moses the angel of death himself will pass through Egypt and the firstborn of each household – man and animal will die. This final plague would cause Pharaoh to not only allow them to leave, but he’ll urge them to depart as quickly as possible. How were the Israelites to escape this plague? What would tell the angel of death that a specific house was to be spared?

**Exodus chapter 12:** [And] the LORD said to Moses... 2...3 “Tell the whole community of Israel that...each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. 4...5 The [lambs] you choose must be 1 year-old males without spot or blemish - in other words, perfect (✞) …the members of the community of Israel must slaughter them (✞)...7 Then they are to take…the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of their houses… 12 “On that...night I will pass through Egypt and strike down every firstborn of both people and animals, and I will bring judgment on all the gods of Egypt. I am the LORD. 13 [But] the blood on the houses…will be a sign… and when I see the blood, I will pass over it. (Hence, the name “Passover”) [The]... plague will not touch you when I strike Egypt. 14This is a day you are to commemorate; for all generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD…” This was the Passover feast Jesus and his disciples, and all Jewish people celebrated the night before his crucifixion. And they still do. In our liturgical calendar today, we commemorate this on Holy Thursday of Holy Week.

So what spared the Israelites from judgement and death? **The blood of a lamb!** From that night on, in the Old Testament, innocent lambs with no blemish or fault were
used as a sacrifice - payment for people’s sins. We’ve all heard how Jesus is “the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophesies and symbolism that foretold his coming, who he was, and what he would do once he came. So when John the Baptist saw Jesus and proclaimed in a loud voice, ‘Behold the Lamb of God!’ it wasn’t just something he came up with. Moved by the Holy Spirit, John the Baptist must’ve “got it” and made the connection between the centuries of sacrificial lambs, the fact that they had to be without blemish (perfect as Christ was perfect) and that now His blood would be shed instead. No longer were innocent lambs the sacrifice, but the perfect Son of God. No longer would blood be spread on the doorposts, but shed on a cross. No longer would sins be removed by the sacrifice of an innocent lamb, but by the innocent Lamb of God – Christ himself. The long awaited Messiah. And, the people who heard this, would’ve made an immediate connection, for it captured their relationship with God and the means or process by which their sins were removed… by the blood of a lamb. So, when John said those words it would have really meant something to them.

- So, here we are in the year 2020. What does it mean to us? We’ve heard it so many, many times at so many, many Masses. Does it still stir us? Does it stir us in a way that affects our lives M-F? It’s good (and maybe sort of easy) to be “stirred” at Mass. But the hard part comes Monday through Friday, aye?

- **Confirmation Students**, Does knowing the Lamb of God affect how you act at home, how you interact with mom and dad? Or how you act away from home …like at school? Or on a date? Does knowing The Lamb of God influence that?

- **All**: Understand, I’m not saying there needs to be a “life changing religious experience” every time we attend Mass.
Drawing closer to God is a process – a process that goes on all our lives. *On the other hand,* if it **never stirs us,** never causes us to change course, never prompts us to take a good look at things, well, then **maybe** we’re not recognizing Jesus for who he really is. “**The Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world!**” **Your** sins. **My** sins. Deacon’s sins. May God still stir our hearts every time we hear it (and every time we come forward in Holy Communion to receive it). And may Berlin notice the difference.

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**Background Story:**
Once a kid in a small Wisconsin town was taught well about God, and while he already belonged to a great Christian community, one Christmas Eve he found himself with some Catholic friends at midnight Mass at the Catholic Church on Main Street. He didn’t understand everything that was happening but when the priest held up the chalice and host and said: “**Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**”, his heart skipped a beat. And a light went on. He had heard those words from the Bible before, but this time it was different. And he knew (*without knowing how*) he knew that Jesus was on the altar. Not a symbol or a mere representation. But that something very holy had just happened. As we said earlier, John the Baptist **was the first** to utter those words, so for **John** “a light had to go on” as well. He (and all of Israel) had been waiting for the Messiah, but had no idea what he would look like, or who he was, or what he would do exactly. But the Holy Spirit opened John’s eyes, and when he saw him, he knew! May that same Spirit open our eyes as well.