

### **Behold the Lamb of God – (Am I worthy? ...Yes, the Wedding Supper of the Lamb)**

One of the most emotional parts of the Mass for me as a priest is the last dialogue prayer between the priest and the people before Holy Communion begins. After singing the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei* in Latin), everyone kneels, and then the priest holds up the newly consecrated host along with the chalice and the new precious blood, and he declares,

***“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.”***

And the people respond with their hearts full of faith,

***“Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof,***

***but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.”***

This is emotional for me as a priest for a number of reasons. First of all, there are many prayers that the Church says the priest should refrain from saying with the people in order to emphasize the dialogue between the priest and the people. This is especially important to help the people realize the special presence of Jesus in the priest during the Mass, which allows the Catholic Priest to stand in His place and Jesus can truly work through the priest's words, actions, and movements to speak to each person and to consecrate the bread and wine into Jesus' very body, blood, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist. However, on this occasion, the rubrics of the Mass mandate that the priest says the response along with the people. The priest is truly not worthy to be standing where He is standing and doing what He is doing during each and every Mass. It is only through God's grace that every priest can become a worthy instrument of Christ to the world in this way.

Secondly, I also get emotional because of the beauty of the prayer itself. The priest is quoting John the Baptist who pointed out Jesus as the lamb of God to some of his first disciples (see John 1:29), which is a reference in and of itself to fulfilling all the Old Testament prophecies about the Lamb of God, the Passover meal, the Old Testament covenants, and the Jewish messiah figure who dies for his people. In addition, the priest's prayer here is also referencing Revelation 19:9 and the wedding supper of the lamb in heaven. Bread certainly symbolizes all food and sustenance in general, but this bread of the New Covenant, this is truly Jesus Christ, and this wedding feast or wedding supper is what is TRULY satisfy our hearts and souls for all eternity.

Finally, the response that the priest says to the people is also such a beautiful reference in Scripture. This is a reference to a number of scripture passages, but it especially brings to mind the Roman Centurion who asks Jesus to heal his servant (Matthew 8:8 etc.). Jesus is about to follow the soldier to the proper location, but this influential man (a centurion was in charge of 100 soldiers) instead declares that he is not worthy to have Jesus follow him. Instead, out of great faith, he says that Jesus has the power to heal his servant from a long distance because he is in charge of all spirits and has power over all things in a real way. The humility and faith in this passage brings a strong reaction and teaching from Jesus to his other followers. We are not worthy of the depth of God's infinite love, but through Jesus, we can have the confidence to ask for Him to come to us, to heal our souls, and to lift us up to new levels of faith and relationship with God. May we ask God today for that humility and faith, and may we be thankful once again for the gift of Jesus in the Eucharist, who comes to us fully at every Mass in the Eucharist. We see visibly the Lamb of God and truly the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!