

# The Lamb of God

When gathering with family or friends for a meal, bread is broken. The word *companion* has its roots in breaking bread together. The first part of the word, *com*, means “together with” in Latin. The second part of the word comes from the Latin *panis*, meaning “bread.”

To companion someone literally means to break bread with the person. This is what Jesus did at the Last Supper, and this is what Catholics do whenever they gather around the table of the Eucharist—they break bread together.

For the first Christians, the act of breaking bread together was so significant that they named the entire celebration of the Eucharist “the breaking of the bread.” The Acts of the Apostles 2:42 states, “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of the bread and to the prayers.”

To the Apostles, the breaking of the bread symbolized the unity they shared with Christ and with one another, something that St. Paul echoed in the First Letter to the Corinthians. “The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ. Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (10:16b–17).

This symbolism was better expressed in the early years of the Church, when the presider broke one loaf for all to share. Usually today, the hosts that are consecrated are pieced and prepared in advance, and the presider breaks only his host into smaller pieces.

During this breaking of the consecrated bread, which is also called the Fraction Rite, the Agnus Dei or Lamb of God is said or sung. The text of the Lamb of God repeats the words spoken by John the Baptist upon seeing Jesus: “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Biblical scholars say that when John calls Jesus the Lamb of God, he is referring to the lamb in the fourth Servant song in the book of the prophet Isaiah:



God’s mercy calls on the faithful to imitate the Lamb of God, who was broken for the sake of others.

Though harshly treated, he submitted  
and did not open his mouth;  
Like a lamb led to slaughter  
or a sheep silent before shearers,  
he did not open his mouth. . . .  
My servant, the just one, shall justify the many  
their iniquity he shall bear. (Isaiah 53:7–11)

In Aramaic, which John would have spoken, the words *Talya de’laha* can be used to mean both “Lamb of God” and “Servant of God.” In the passage from Isaiah, echoed by John the Baptist, Jesus is prefigured as the Servant-Lamb.

The Lamb of God always ends with the invocation “Grant us peace.” When the Lamb of God is sung, praise is given to God, who desires to share in our broken humanity and grants us a share in his divinity. God’s mercy calls on the faithful to imitate the Lamb of God, who was broken for the sake of others. When this is done, the true meaning of the word *companion* is discovered.

