

2A 2020 SML
JN 1:29-34

The day after his Baptism, Our Blessed Lord appeared once again on the banks of the Jordan and John pointed Him out as the Lamb of God. Since in two chapter's time, the Passover would be celebrated, the streets were filled with people carrying their one-year-old lambs to the temple to be sacrificed. In full view of those lambs, John the Baptist pointed out the Lamb of God, Who, when sacrificed, would put an end to all the sacrifices in the temple, because HE, Jesus, would take away the sins of the world, not repeated animal sacrifice to Yahweh.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

Lambs as sacrificial offerings were a part of everyday life for the Jewish people, for according to Exodus 29:38:

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two yearling lambs as the sacrifice established for each day; one lamb in the morning and one in the evening twilight.

There were also two great analogies using the all too familiar lamb as given by the prophets. Jeremiah (11:19) wrote:

I, like a trusting lamb led to the slaughter, did not realize that they were hatching plots against me.

Yet the more popular quotation came from Isaiah (53:7), which became for the Church one of the most precious prophecies of Our Crucified Lord in all of the Old Testament:

Though he was harshly treated, he submitted and opened not his mouth; Like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.

It makes perfect sense then, that Good Friday's Commemoration of the Lord's Passion would include this verse in the first reading.

Perhaps, John the Baptist was the first to realize the picture painted in Isaiah 53 was a prophecy of Jesus when John said, "Behold the Lamb of God."

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.

As some of you may already know, I had a very close priest friend of mine, Father Curt Delarm, who died from Lou Gehrig's Disease almost 15 years ago. Lou Gehrig's disease is named after the baseball player who had the disease, also referred to as ALS (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis)], which usually starts in people over 40 years of age as with mild weakness in the arms or legs or minimal difficulty speaking or swallowing. For Curt, the weakness began in his arms and

hands. He would drop things for no apparent reason. The disease progresses to affect every muscle in the body, causing its victims to require wheelchairs and eventually not have the strength even to breathe so that they die from suffocation. ALS is a very heavy cross to bear.

Curt and I became friends almost 35 years ago while we were studying for the priesthood at Mt. St. Mary's Seminary. I guess what attracted me to Curt was his infectious laugh, which, as our friendship developed, became almost embarrassing if not annoying. He was a handsome man, not very athletic, who enjoyed the simplest of things.

His attitude was one of utter simplicity. I remember one evening during finals we decided to take a break from studying and went to the 7-11 for an ice cream cone. We were sitting on the hood of my 1983 Ford Escort eating an ice cream cone, and Curt said to me, "This is really living." And I said, "Curt, this is not 'really living.' This is an ice cream cone, and you and I have four exams waiting for us back at the seminary. So no, this is NOT really living at all."

Although not an athlete, he was an expert water skier. He owned his own boat. Part of Curt loved living on the edge. A bunch of us from the seminary went on vacation one summer,

and we were walking down the Wildwood boardwalk and he said, “Come on. Let’s go. I want to go bungee jumping.” And he did, and he screamed like a big old girl the whole way down and the whole way up.

Long before he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s Disease, Curt had a tough life. His parents split when he was a toddler, which affected him in his later years. When he told me in a parking lot in Washington, DC, on the Fourth of July, 1997, that he was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig’s Disease, he told me his whole life was a struggle and things did not come easy for him, and now he had a disease that would “get him.” As he was going for the tests to determine what was wrong, he said he never thought he had something that would “get (kill) him.”

For the eight years Curt suffered with ALS before he died, Curt did not complain. To paraphrase the prophet Isaiah, Curt was roughly treated by Lou Gehrig’s disease. He could move nothing. He was confined to his wheelchair or to his bed. He could still speak, and chew and swallow, but he needed to concentrate or he would aspirate. I couldn’t make him laugh when I was feeding him, because if he laughed, he would aspirate. His lung capacity was reduced to 14 percent. And he did not complain. Like Isaiah 53:

He has been roughly treated but he submitted and opened not his mouth; like a lamb led to the slaughter or a sheep before the shearers, he was silent and opened not his mouth.

Father Curt Delarm reminds me of the lamb led to the sacrifice, resigning himself, not to the will of God, for he knew that Lou Gehrig's disease was not what God willed for him, but resigning himself to life with all its imperfections, with all its uncertainty. I tried to visit Curt four times a year, as he lived about three hours from NJ, and every visit was a reality check. Visiting Curt put my life's struggles in the proper place in a matter of minutes. For eight years, Curt Delarm provided me with my own personal Tuesdays with Morrie.

Father Curt was interviewed a few times by local papers. He received the Cardinal McCloskey Award, the highest possible honor to be bestowed on an alumnus from Mt. St. Mary's Seminary. In his interviews and in his acceptance speech, Curt talked about what a freeing experience this illness was for him. As more and more of his ability and physical faculties were taken away, he "was freed" because he was forced to let it go and to accept what is.

In addition to calling Jesus the Lamb of God, John also told his hearers that the Spirit came down like a dove and

remained upon Him. Though I saw no dove, I firmly believe the Holy Spirit remained with Curt, and never left him.

What's the point? What's the value here? Suffering. Jesus suffered to expiate, to make up for our sins, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And this life certainly contains suffering, more for Curt, less for me, but suffering nonetheless. And sooner or later, we will all suffer, more for some, less for others, but joined with the suffering of Christ, suffering takes away the sins of the world.

Lou Gehrig's Disease didn't "get Curt." Death didn't get Curt. Curt didn't lose the fight. I am never comfortable reading those obituaries that say "so n so lost their battle to cancer." They didn't lose anything. Death did not get the last word. Jesus gets the last word.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.