

Lamb of God

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One of the oldest descriptions for Mass—the eucharistic liturgy—is “the breaking of the bread.” Saint Paul often referred to this imagery of the breaking of the bread in his letters. The broken Body is given to make many disciples one body in Christ. It is a paradoxical image. The Body of Christ is broken for many disciples, so that many disciples might become one in Christ. This is a beautiful image and theology of healing, reconciliation, and communion: many becoming one in Christ Jesus.

After the Sign of Peace at Mass, the Lamb of God is begun while the priest, deacon, and/or concelebrant break(s) the eucharistic bread, the Body of Christ. In many parishes, servers will typically bring more ciboria for the eucharistic Body of Christ to the altar-table during the Lamb of God so that the fractured pieces may be divided for the ease of distributing Holy Communion to the lay faithful.

This rite should not be unnecessarily extended (see *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, 83). As we have seen, a powerful theological importance underlies our understanding of this rite, so why the caution of unnecessarily prolonging or adding undue importance to this rite? Perhaps, and this is my hypothesis, it is because it may overshadow two more important liturgical acts within Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer and the Communion procession. During the Eucharistic Prayer, the priest and people pray for God, through Christ, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, to change bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Moving forward during the Communion procession, we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in order to be united, and in communion, with the



Triune God and with one another. Therefore, this rite is secondary to those two important liturgical acts.

During this breaking of the Body of Christ—also known as the fraction rite—we sing a litany: The Lamb of God.

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

Our liturgical documents—including the directions in *The Roman Missal*—allow for the singing of multiple invocations while the Body of Christ is being broken so that the text of the Lamb of God is connected to the entire fraction rite. The final invocation ends with “grant us peace.” This prayer text, which is often sung, is a direct prayer to Christ who is the “Lamb of God.” Christ Jesus takes “away the sins of the world.” On the surface level, it may seem a strange text for the Fraction Rite. However, Christ Jesus was the Lamb slain on the Cross at the time of the Jewish Passover when lambs were slain. Three days later, God resurrected Christ Jesus, and in so doing, he took “away the sins of the world.” Sin prevents union and communion with God and one another. Therefore, through Jesus’ death and Resurrection he establishes communion and union with us. Sin fractures relationships between us and God, but God in Christ Jesus unites our brokenness, our division into one, into the body of Christ. In our wounded and brokenness, Christ Jesus heals, reconciles, and brings us into communion with his very being.