

January 18, 2026—Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

At the very beginning of Jesus' public life, the idea of His sacrificial death is mentioned. John the Baptist recognized Jesus as the Savior and said: "**Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world**". The Lamb of God is a title that had rich meaning for the Jewish people.

Reaching back to the Book of Genesis, God clearly made known that true worship principally involved sacrifice. It was the sacrifice of an animal by Abel, not the first fruits of the ground by Cain, that was acceptable to God. Later, the sacrifice of bread and wine by the priest Melchizedek would be seen as a secondary form of worship, but the animal sacrifice would always take first place. The reason is that the death of an animal was a vivid symbol—you could say, the stand-in—for a man who wanted to give his life to God. Later, in history, Moses would sprinkle the people of Israel with the blood of a lamb to symbolize atonement from sin.

A lamb was one of the acceptable animals for proper worship of God. A lamb was docile to the shepherd and, as the Bible says, would be led to its slaughter without resistance. Of course, all the thousands upon thousands of lambs offered in the Old Testament did not have understanding or the choice to die in a sacrifice. They were all pointing to the true Lamb of God, Jesus. The verse from the Responsorial Psalm is most perfectly applied to Jesus: "**Here I am Lord, I come to do Your will.**" He came into the world to willingly die on the cross. Like a pure and unblemished, docile lamb, He was obedient to His Heavenly Father and offered Himself in atonement for the sins of the world. Even one drop of His Most Precious Blood was enough to expiate the sins of all mankind.

The most meaningful Old Testament sacrifice that points to Jesus is the Passover Lamb from the time of Moses. To free the people from slavery to Pharaoh, the Israelites had to sacrifice a lamb, roast it, and eat it in the sacred Passover meal. The blood of the lamb was used to mark the doors of the Israelites, indicating their participation in this sacrificial meal and thus the angel of death would pass over their houses leaving the first-born son unharmed. The Passover lamb or Paschal Lamb pointed to Jesus who would free us from the slavery to sin.

All the ideas of worship and sacrifice came together at the Last Supper. It was at the Last Supper, a Passover meal, that Jesus instituted the holy Mass. This was to fulfill Old Testament worship and become the perfect way in which we can worship God in the New Covenant. At the Last Supper, He was anticipating the sacrifice on Calvary that would happen the next day. Just as the Passover meal

renewed the original event in Egypt, so the Holy Mass would renew His sacrifice on Calvary. That is the true meaning of the word “memorial” or “do this in memory of me”. Not just remember the event but renew it with all its grace and mercy. St. Paul would later write to the Corinthians, after describing the institution at the Last Supper, he said, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink this chalice, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”** (1 Cor. 11:26).

The principal purpose of the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass is to offer worship to God. Yes, we receive great benefit from all the grace and mercy that is poured out upon us each time we participate in this Sacrament, but its purpose is more than about what I receive. We can be confused into thinking that if I don’t feel like coming to Mass, but would rather spend more time with my pillow, or if I don’t have any warm and uplifting feelings when I come, then I have wasted my time. That makes everything about me, rather than about God. With that attitude one will not receive much from this most Holy Sacrament. I should be here to worship my God in the way that He desires.

I can make up my own kind of ceremony to worship God, which many sincere Christians do. Even when I worship with the best of intentions, it really isn’t the best. I am often distracted or half-hearted and sinful, but Jesus, true God and true man can give the Heavenly Father the perfect form of worship. He already did when He submitted to the plan of God as the docile lamb who was led to the slaughter on the Cross. Wouldn’t it be amazing if there was some way I could unite myself to the sacrifice of the cross after many centuries? Wouldn’t it have great power if I could unite my offering to the perfect offering of Jesus and give the Heavenly Father the perfect form of worship which He deserves? Wouldn’t it be wonderful if I could receive the original grace and mercy that flowed from the Cross here and now?

Well, we can! All those things are meant to happen as we celebrate the Mass. They are the very purposes, among others, that Jesus established the Holy Eucharist. During the Offertory prayers, the priest extends his hands and says, **“Pray, brothers and sisters that my sacrifice and yours may be acceptable to God the Almighty Father.”** As the priest offers the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ, you are invited to offer yourself, along with Jesus to the Father in the renewal of the sacrifice on Calvary. He wants to transform your offering by uniting it to His so that you can give perfect worship to God. **“Through Him and with Him and in Him, O God almighty Father, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, all glory and honor is yours, forever and ever. Amen.”**

January 11, 2026—Solemnity of the Baptism of the Lord

This is the last day of the Christmas season; we leave the birth of Jesus and the events surrounding it behind and jump 30 years to His baptism by His cousin, John the Baptist in the River Jordan. There are five Sundays after today that are part of the season of Ordinary Time, then we begin the season of Lent. The Scripture readings of the next 5 Sundays of Ordinary Time narrate the beginning of Jesus' public life mostly from the perspective of the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus' own baptism foreshadows Christian baptism which we receive in the Catholic Church. It was instituted by Jesus 40 days after Easter, just before He ascended into the glory of heaven. There is great meaning behind Jesus' baptism, which Pope St. John Paul made the first of the Luminous Mysteries of the Holy Rosary. It is from the Gospel of St. John that we get the words of John the Baptist when he first saw Jesus on the Jordan. These are the words that the priest repeats in every Holy Mass when He holds up the consecrated Host before Holy Communion: **“Behold, the Lamb of God, behold Him who takes away the sins of the world.”** John expressed his belief in Jesus as the Savior on the day of His baptism, and we express our belief in Jesus truly present in the Blessed Sacrament making John the Baptist's words our own.

Matthew's Gospel today told us that John the Baptist first objected to baptizing Jesus. He had been preparing the way for the Messiah, and when he saw Jesus, he knew that He was the Messiah and humbly said: **“I need to be baptized by you, and yet you are coming to me.”**

Jesus didn't need to repent of sins and receive sanctifying grace in His soul, like we do. He wanted to be baptized by John to align Himself with what John was doing—preparing the way for Him. It is another example of the humility of Jesus.

Christian Baptism is Trinitarian. We were baptized, **“In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”**. A few years ago, there was an article in the Catholic Press that spoke about a young priest who was watching a video of his own baptism as a baby. He was shocked to hear that the deacon who was administering the baptism didn't use the correct words as the water was poured. He immediately informed his bishop who told him to stop his priestly ministry. He had to be baptized, with the correct words, receive the Sacrament of Confirmation and be ordained a deacon and a priest once again before he could resume celebrating the sacraments. Baptism is the first of the sacraments and transforms

and seals the soul by the power of the Holy Spirit so that we can be saved and also receive the other sacraments.

At the baptism of Jesus, we see the three Persons of the Holy Trinity present on the River Jordan in different ways. Of course, the Son of God is present in His human nature to be baptized by John. Then the Holy Spirit appears in the form of a dove. This becomes one of the main images we use in art to picture the Holy Spirit. God the Father is present at the baptism of Jesus by His voice, His words, which were **“This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased.”**

At our baptism, we had Original Sin washed away and were given the gift of Sanctifying grace, which are tremendous things, but we were also made children of God. After your baptism, our Heavenly Father could look at you and say, “This is my beloved son or beloved daughter with whom I am well pleased.” Baptism is primarily the work of God; our part is to respond to that gift of grace.

We speak about self-esteem and self-worth a lot these days. We often base that upon whether I am successful or a failure or whether people like me or don’t like me, whether I can accomplish this thing or not, whether I am productive or not. If we place our self-worth on things like that, which most people do, then we are in danger of becoming very discouraged with life. Sometimes we are successful, sometimes not. Baptism speaks the truth about your self-worth—you are a child of God! You have a great value, an infinite value in the sight of God that cannot be taken away by the changeable conditions of life.

This also means that we need to treat others with the dignity they deserve because they have by been created in the image and likeness of God, and for many, made a child of God through baptism. Are we lifting people up with our words and deeds or putting them down? Are we striving to make those around us feel that they have great value or do we mainly focus on ourselves and our needs? God loves each one of us; He calls us to love like He does and show people that they have great value in our sight. That is certainly foundational to the pro-life message we must bring to the world.

Baptism is not just a nice ceremony, but the beginning of a whole new way of life that is meant to end in heaven.