Spirituality
Pencil Preaching



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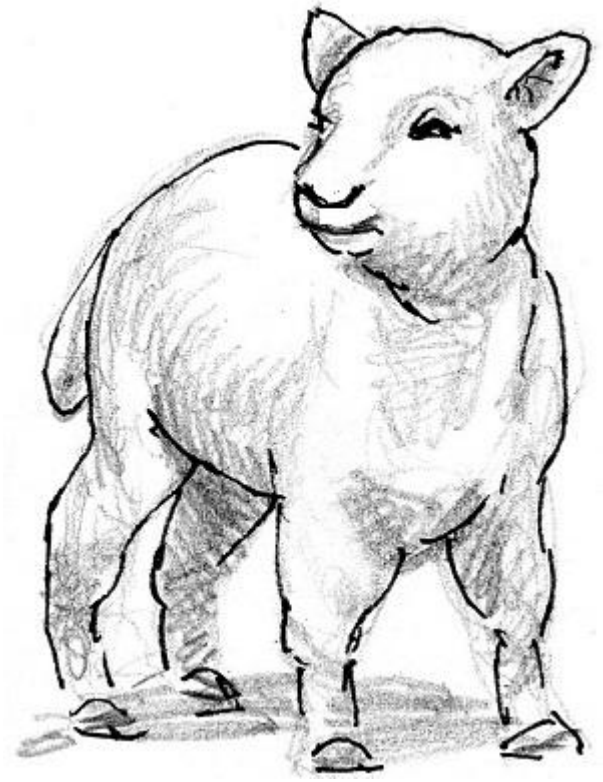

“Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29).

1 Jn 2:29–3:6; Jn 1:29-34

The weight of real sin is something human beings have struggled with from the earliest recorded history. Religion has offered symbolic and ritual ways to lift sin's burden through confession and some kind of expiation. Our logics says that we must pay for our sins, either with money (indulgences) or by acts of restitution (penance and good works). In fact, to ignore serious sin can lead to psychological and emotional illness, especially when it is buried under soul-numbing distractions or self-justifying denial.

The practice of selecting a lamb, representing spotless innocence, and transferring our sins to it and then sacrificing it as a sin offering is common in the Bible. In the New Testament, when John the Baptist calls Jesus the "Lamb of God," he is describing the role Jesus will play in lifting the burden of sin from humankind by taking it onto himself as a sacrificial victim.

Jesus' death on the cross at Passover time will reinforce this symbolism. By his blood, like the blood placed on the door posts of the Hebrews as they escaped slavery in Egypt, Jesus was seen as fulfilling the Exodus from the slavery of sin and death for all people.

Human failure is often the path to conversion. We strive to be blameless in our personal lives but discover our complicity in social sins, the collective selfishness that hurts the poor, the structural sin that favors some by exploiting others. Or we find that even if we keep every rule, relationships require a much higher standard of love that is impossible to meet without making mistakes, hurting others and being hurt ourselves.

No one reaches maturity without failure and regret. So, we must learn to live in a continual state of offering and seeking forgiveness, with many things left painfully unresolved. Therapy and personal generosity can help, but no one who has lived can claim to be guilt-free and without sin. What are we to do?

Our incorporation into Jesus by baptism offers us a way of life that frees us from paralysis and self-lacerating regret. But it also invites us to take the next step. We can offer ourselves for others with sacrificial love, patiently absorbing their troubled lives into our own by suffering with them. This accompaniment is the real antidote for our own sinfulness and the path to the maturity of discipleship, to be like the Master, who is the Lamb of God.