

Ex 12:1–13  
“Agnus Dei”  
Good Friday

April 10, 2020  
Our Redeemer Lutheran Church  
Pastor Hartwig

Grace, mercy, and peace from God, our Heavenly Father, and Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ –

**[Introduction]**

In the Prado Museum in Madrid, Spain,  
you will find this stunning masterpiece.  
The seventeenth-century Spanish artist  
painted it from 1635 to 1640.

**[PICTURE]**

He called it Agnus Dei—that’s Latin for “Lamb of God.”  
The painting is simple:  
a wooly merino lamb is lying on his side on a grey slab.

As we observe the picture, the lamb is facing the left.  
He has elegantly curved horns.  
All four of his feet are bound together  
with two strands of a cord.  
The knot isn’t visible.  
With his feet tied together, the lamb’s back is elevated as he lies on the slab.  
His left eye (the only one we can see) is open,  
pale eyelashes delicately line his eye.  
We can see that the lamb is looking down,  
past his pink nose, at the grey slab.  
There is no blood in the painting so the lamb is alive  
—but the lamb won’t be alive for long.

Still life paintings of the seventeenth century rarely displayed emotion.  
Not here. Not in the Agnus Dei.  
The lamb shows emotion—the emotion of resignation.  
He isn’t struggling to free himself.  
He isn’t kicking and screaming.  
The lamb is ready to die.

Light shines down on the lamb from the upper left at a high angle,  
so that only a little shadow is thrown.  
Beyond the pool of light that bathes the lamb,  
it is all dark—very, very dark.

**[PICTURE AWAY]**

[*Exodus 12*]

Exodus 12. It's all about the Agnus Dei—the Lamb of God.

Exodus 12:3–5: “*Tell the whole community of Israel that on the tenth day of this month each man is to take a lamb for his family, one for each household. The animals you choose must be year-old males without defect.*”

The Passover lamb must be male  
and he must be perfect—he can't be crippled, lame, spotted, or off-color.

After choosing the lamb,  
the people are to guard and watch over him for three days.  
Then, on the fourteenth day of the month,  
the entire community of Israel is to gather at twilight.  
Then, they slaughter the lamb.

Exodus 12:7: “*Then they are to take some of the blood and put it on the sides and tops of the doorframes of the houses where they eat the lambs.*”

The blood of the Lamb will set the people free  
—free from darkness and death of Egypt.

[*PICTURE*]

Look again at the Agnus Dei.

The black background serves to highlight the lamb's white wool.  
Here is a lamb that is perfect and without defect.

The dark background, though, does something else.  
It also highlights the reason the lamb was slaughtered.

[*PICTURE AWAY*]

Luther famously called it *incurvates in se*—  
another Latin phrase that means “turned in on self.”

In our darkness we turn in toward  
our own interests and our own desires and our own needs and our own agendas.  
We look to me, myself, and I.

Call it individualism. Call it narcissism. Call it selfishness.  
Call it whatever you call it  
BUT you must also call it what it is—sin.  
AND sin is dark—sin is very, very dark.

Many times we think...

*“To turn outward towards God and other people is too risky.  
I might get hurt and disappointed and frustrated.  
It’s better, and it’s much safer, to turn towards self.”*

So we live in a tight, fetal position.

It leads to isolation, disconnectedness and despair.

Sin—incurvates in se—

it seduces us, it traps us, and then it kills us.

[*Walk into the Picture*]

You know...

Sometimes people dream that they can enter into paintings.

You know, take a walk in the Starry Night with Vincent van Gough

or listen to the Mona Lisa with Leonardo da Vinci.

or meet the woman and the man holding the pitchfork

in the American Gothic painting.

[**PICTURE**]

What would we do... if we could enter de the Agnus Dei masterpiece?

The impulse might be to untie the lamb, to set him loose, to set him free.

After all

He looks so innocent, so kind, so loving.

He doesn’t deserve to die!

If you notice closely, the knot is out of sight.

And the knot is out of sight because the lamb can’t be freed.

There is nothing we can do for this lamb.

The Lamb must be slaughtered

because his blood alone will set us free.

[**PICTURE AWAY**]

*“The blood will be a sign for you on the houses where you are;  
and when I see the blood, I will pass over you.*

*No destructive plague will touch you when I strike Egypt” (Ex 12:13).*

The Lamb’s blood flowed again in Gethsemane

when, as Luke tells us, Jesus was

in such agony that he sweat great drops of blood.

You can bet that when the Roman soldiers blindfolded Jesus

and began punching him in the face

that there was more blood.

And blood flowed from his scalp  
as a crown of thorns was shoved onto his head.  
But the real blood-bath was at Gabbatha  
where our Savior was stripped naked and whipped  
—whipped without mercy.

And the blood continued to flow from his open wounds  
as he carried his crosspiece on the Via Delarosa  
—more Latin, meaning “the Way of Sorrow.”  
You just heard Myrl Holida and Louise Klopp sing about it.

Then ... there were three nails  
and the final blow—the Roman spear thrust  
and suddenly there was a flow of water and blood.

*[Blood of Jesus]*

We are washed clean in the blood of the Lamb. You and me!  
Jesus shed his blood for us.  
By faith, we are washed clean in the blood of Jesus.  
It's the only way to free us from  
an eternity of incurvates in se—turned in on self.

In the end, at the very end, blood was all Jesus had.  
His disciples had deserted him.  
His garments had been gambled away.  
Even his Father had turned his back.

Blood was all Jesus had,  
but the blood of Jesus is all we need.  
The blood of Jesus is all we need!

The shed blood of Christ is the price of our redemption  
and the symbol of its completion.

Agnus Dei – Look the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!  
Amen!

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As followers of Christ, “Keep loving one another earnestly  
And show hospitality to one another without grumbling.” AMEN! (1 Pt 4:8-9)

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