

Roman Missal, 3rd Edition

Looking at the text 9

Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away the sins of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.

The Invitation to Communion

Behold the Lamb of God

An earlier sheet looked at the idea of Jesus as the Lamb of God. It is also interesting to ask why we are changing in the new translation from 'this is' to 'Behold'.

When he sees Jesus walking by, John the Baptist points him out to his own disciples 'here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world' (John Chapter 1 verse 29). The 'here is' has a sense to it of 'look' or 'pay attention' or 'behold'. For this reason in the new translation of the Communion invitation we use the word 'Behold' rather than the simpler 'this is' which could be taken to be the beginning of a line that is simply a statement.

Also there is the feel of another passage from Saint John's Gospel (Chapter 19 verse 5) where Pontius Pilate draws attention to Jesus as he emerges bound having been scourged and crowned with thorns. Pilate says 'Here is,' or 'Behold, the man' (see also Zechariah 6;12-13). Pointing out Jesus to the crowd is, in one way, a simple indication that he is standing there



these same words of the centurion. Again, they were not apologising for dirty paintwork or broken furniture. They were admitting their unworthiness that the Lord should enter their house, under their roof, let alone the home of their hearts. They recognized they did not deserve so great a guest even as they realized they needed him and gladly welcomed him. A quite natural development included this line in the Mass for us all.

It is very appropriate that this greeting spoken as the Lord enters the dwelling of a sick person should be said by everyone receiving Jesus. We might not need a visit from the local GP but we all rely on the one who heals all our ills.

The new translation retrieves this line 'under my roof' and this can help me think of how Jesus makes his home in me as I must make mine in him. I must make him welcome, listen to him and wait upon him as Martha and Mary did when they welcomed Jesus under their roof. It can lead me to think of how I take Christ with me as I leave Mass to bring him, in my heart, into the heart of my home. He is to be that silent, unseen guest under my roof. I have received him in Holy Communion and I must be aware that he comes with me in my daily life.

As I echo the words of the centurion about my unworthiness to welcome Jesus I do not simply ask for forgiveness but healing. I admit that I am a sinner in need of the healing touch of Jesus to mend my life so that I may amend it. In receiving him in Communion I admit my weakness and my need of this medicinal nourishment.

Q *Pause for a moment to reflect upon or discuss with others this idea of welcoming Jesus 'under my roof'.
Take time to think about those aspects of myself and my life that need healing.*

One of a series of resources produced by the Liturgy Office of the Bishops' Conference to accompany the introduction of the 3rd edition of the *Roman Missal* © 2011 Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales.

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but there is a deeper sense. When Pilate says ‘Behold the man’ it is as if unconsciously he is pointing out the perfect human being, the model for all others and the fulfilment of humanity.

We believe that we are made in the image of God and in Jesus we see the image most perfectly – he is the starting point of the creation of humanity. He is also the new Adam, for his obedience reverses the disobedience of the first human as described in the book of Genesis. It will lead beyond the cross to resurrection with a recreation of humanity in his image. This change is begun in each of us at Baptism, renewed in the Eucharist and brought to fulfilment in Heaven.

The word ‘behold’ is a solemn invitation to look upon the Saviour and receive him who comes to transform us by his death and resurrection. He comes to change us into his likeness as we become what we eat in Holy Communion.

Q *Think about this use of the word ‘Behold’.*
Do you think we are aware that we are being changed into being more like Jesus?

Blessed are those called to the Supper of the Lamb

The words of the priest before Holy Communion are being changed from ‘Happy are those called to his Supper’ to the line above.

On the one hand it is simply a more accurate translation but it also draws out something that can be easily missed. The priest is speaking of those who are blessed because they are invited to the Supper of the Lamb.

We know the Lamb is Jesus and so we can see this line to be saying something about the wonder of being invited to Jesus’ Supper. But it is important to stop and think about this ‘Supper’. There are several interconnected ideas. There is: the Last Supper, the Lord’s Supper and the Lamb’s Supper’

‘The Last Supper’ is that meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he died. During it he gave us the Mass and Holy Communion commanding us to celebrate it in his memory. ‘The Lord’s Supper’ is another name that can be used for the Last Supper. Also it can be used as a title for the Mass itself. As we fulfil his command we are made present

to his saving work. In recalling the words Jesus said at that Supper we understand that we share in the offering of Jesus’ life on the Cross, his sacrifice, and we are joined to his resurrection and glorious ascension.

‘The Lamb’s Supper’ comes from the book of Revelation (Chapter 19 verse 9) where it is called a marriage supper. This marriage feast or supper is alluded to in some of the parables of Jesus about the kingdom of heaven. It is the great feast of celebration in heaven — it is the gift of heaven itself.

The Lamb’s Supper is connected to the Lord’s Supper because our sharing in Mass makes us ready for heaven. The Book of Revelation describes the Lamb’s Supper as a marriage in which we, the Church, will be the mystical bride of Christ. The new translation highlights that the ‘invitation’ said by the priest is not limited to a particular Communion given to us at a particular Mass. Communion is the foretaste and we are being invited to the banquet of heaven.

Q *Think about the idea about Mass and Communion being about the promise of heaven.*
Does the sacrament of Matrimony have anything to tell us about the Mass?

Lord, I am not worthy

When we have visitors coming we often spend time tidying up the house so that everything is presentable and in order. Imagine having a VIP guest come to stay. Such a visit might prompt us to redecorate or do some of the jobs we have been promising to get round to but have never completed.

When the centurion confessed to Jesus that he was unworthy to receive him under his roof — into his house — it was not because things were a bit untidy or in need of a touch of paint. He understood his own unworthiness to receive the Lord on a visit to heal his sick servant (see Matthew Chapter 8).

In the Middle Ages when the priest brought Holy Communion to the housebound they welcomed Jesus into their homes repeating

