

BEHOLD THE LAMB – TAPE #2

“The Lamb: The Mystery Of God’s Suffering Servant”

SIDE #1

Let us pray. Shine in our hearts, oh lord Jesus Christ who loves all humanity, the pure light of your divine knowledge, and open the eyes of our minds, that we may understand the announcing of your holy gospel. Set us in awe of your blessed commandments, so that trampling all carnal desires, we may begin to live according to the Spirit, both willing and doing everything for your pleasure, for you are the light of our souls and bodies Christ God, and we render glory to you and to your eternal father and to your all holy, good and life giving spirit, now and always, and forever and ever. Amen.

Not coming from Ireland, when I decided to give this retreat at Knoch, I thought I’d look on a map to see where Knoch was. And so the map that I looked on, was the map that you have in front of you, that little black card. Can you find Knoch on it? What you have there is a picture of our galaxy, the Milky Way. Now, our earth is one of several planets that revolves around our sun. Our sun is a medium sized star. In our galaxy, there are not a thousand stars, or ten thousand stars, there are not a hundred thousand stars or a million stars. There are not a hundred million stars, or a billion stars. There are hundred billion stars in our galaxy alone. A hundred billion stars in our galaxy alone, and our galaxy is one of a hundred billion galaxies that we know of. What we’re talking about here is space of proportions that we cannot imagine. Just cannot imagine. There are more stars in the heavens than there are grains of sands on the beaches of the earth. The earth is one millionth the size of the sun. Can you imagine what we’re talking about in terms of the immensity of space? And then in terms of time. I mean, we all live 20 or 70 or 80 years, or whatever it is, but we’re talking time going back, not 2000 years from the time of Jesus, or 3000 years to Moses, or 4000 years to Abraham, but billions of years and going to and indefinite future.

We live in the middle of immense incomprehensibility. We haven’t got the slightest idea, for example, of how even our own body works. There are billions and billions and trillions of parts and aspects to it, that have to work in a perfect order, in order for us to live – we don’t even know most of them. Atoms and molecules and so forth, a slight change in any of them and we’re dead. We live in the middle of an incomprehensible mystery, and that is a fact. That is a fact. Therefore, what I’m saying to you today is, this morning is, that the spirituality of the lamb of God begins in the consciousness that reality is different from what we experience it to be. That is, the spirituality of the lamb of God begins in the consciousness that we live in the middle of incomprehensible mystery.

We are born into a question mark, we live in a question mark, and we die into a question mark. There is no doubt about it. I know, and you know, we all know, how the world in a negative sense works. The world works by taking all mystery out of existence. And cutting this massive reality in which we live down to a little two by four square, and

telling us this is reality. Ireland, America, France, China. On that card that I have, that picture of the gal-, Milky Way that I have, where is China? Where is Ireland? Where is America? In terms of the hundred billion stars, where am I? That's reality. That is, that is where we live in.

However, what we do, we cannot tolerate living in a world that's so large as God made it. So we cut the world down to our own size, and the whole world becomes Croatia, Germany, and all life and all values and decisions about what is good and what is evil and what is worthwhile doing and what isn't worthwhile, is all based on this little two by four world. And that world is illusion. That's a fiction of the mind. It's but a tiny little piece of a reality in which we live that's massive and incomprehensible. But, God gave us the power to recognize the mystery in which we live. The dog, the cat, the blade of grass, the sun itself, does not know it exists within this massive mystery. We as human beings and only we as human beings have been created to comprehend mystery. We can comprehend the incomprehensible. We can't understand it, but we know it's there, and that knowledge and that ability was not given to us in order just to ignore it, and make believe it doesn't have any meaning.

The spirituality of the lamb of God is about reality. It starts and it stays conscious of the fact that we live in the middle of mystery, and that little two by four world that we create is only a tiny little speck of the enormity of the reality in which we have been given existence by God.

Now, in the middle of this incomprehensible mystery in which we live, there is a second mystery. And the second mystery is you, me, the individual person. We are a mystery in the strictest sense of the word. We do not understand ourselves. We make believe we do. We don't know how we're made, we don't know how we work. And certainly we don't understand the sources, the roots and so forth, for thoughts, emotions, desires. We are a mystery unto ourselves. You have lived, and I have lived, a certain number of years, see. Now someone sees me, and they say, oh yeah, I saw a picture of him in the paper or something, that's Emmanuel McCarthy, that priest. Ha, the know me – that takes care of that. Or someone sees you, you know – and you have your hair done a certain way or, or you're wearing the habit of a sister, a priest or something like that, and they say, oh, oh, there's a, there's a sister of Saint Joseph, Sister Mary – that's it, that takes – now we know you. And that's how we live, day in and day out. But that's not so. That's just a, that's just a way of getting through the day. You, I, every human being – there is an infinity behind each face, an infinity behind each face. And when we lose, when we lose consciousness of the infinity behind each face, and the infinite mystery in which we live, then we begin to suffocate in the hell of the finite. We are made for the infinite. It is our choice not to look at it. It is our choice just to see people as Catholic, as Protestant, as Muslim, as black or white or whatever, you know, Irish or French or American or German. It's our choice to label people and relate to them in terms of our label versus the infinite mystery that's behind each face. He's smart, he's stupid, he's important, he's unimportant, by what standards? By the standards of the little two by four world.

And then we begin to relate and we lose all sense of reality, that is, the enormity of the mystery of each human being within the mystery of existence. We lose contact, literally, with awe, A-W-E. And when we lose contact with awe, we of course begin to lose contact with the depths of reverence and piety. For behind all the mystery there is another mystery. The mystery of God. If the universe and all its incomprehensibility and massiveness is mystery, if each human being with his or her consciousness and the structure of their lives and their person and their history, if there is an infinity behind each human face, then behind all that mystery, there is the great mystery of God.

But if we take the world, and we break it down into a little two by four thing, then we lose the mystery of the person, we lose the mystery of reality, and what does God become? God becomes just a justifier of the two by four world. Just a way of saying, my two by four world is real. God becomes on the side of my two by four world. Ireland, America, Germany, God is with me, but with no one else. God is no longer mystery, God is a patriot. God is no longer a mystery, God is my tool to get what I want.

When we lose contact with the enormity of the mystery of existence, we lose contact with the reality of the mystery that's the source of it all. Silence, meditative prayer, is meant to put us in contact with the mystery of God, the mystery of reality, the mystery of our lives within reality and within God. And the peace that comes from that.

And there's another mystery. Within the enormous mystery of reality and time and space, within the mystery of you and I, the individual person who lives 70 minutes or 70 years, within the mystery of the God who's behind all that, and the source of all that, and the sustainer of all that, there's another mystery. It is the mystery of Jesus Christ. For like us, Jesus is totally human. He is a human person, who develops, thinks, acts, lives, eats, dies, exactly like us. He is in all ways human, like us, except sin.

Therefore, on that level alone, Jesus is a mystery. He is a mystery like you are a mystery, like I am a mystery, like we're a mystery to each other. We can do to Jesus what we do to each other, too. We can put a label on him. And we lose all the mystery. But there is an enormous mystery behind Jesus, as there is an enormous mystery behind you and I. Same thing, yet there's more to it. Yet there's far more to the mystery of Jesus. Because within this other massive mystery of time and space, and billions of people like you and I, and like Jesus, the mystery of Jesus intensifies because from this person, over the last 2000 years, enormous power has come into the world. People have made choices, they've lived their lives by the billions. They've struggled, they've prayed to, they've talked to this mystery. Out of the billions and billions of people who live, none of them has had this strange kind of effect on human history.

There's a mystery in Jesus that isn't the same as the mystery in us. And we know that, right from the first days of his existence. For example, we see in the New Testament, over and over again, the presentation of Jesus in terms of different titles, people calling him different things. Son of Man, Son of God, Messiah, the Prophet, the Holy One of Israel, Lord. The thing about these titles is, they are not titles that would be applied to you and me or any ordinary person. They are titles that point to something extraordinary in

the human being. And this is the generation that lived right up next to him, that saw him, that talked to him. They knew they were in the presence of a mystery beyond the...

...indeed, the same question comes to us that came to them, back 2000 years ago. As they looked and they watched Jesus, the question was, who is he? Who is this person? Or as he asked Peter, who do you say I am? There was a mystery that surrounded him. You don't call the neighbor next door Lord. You don't call the man across the street the Messiah, the Christ. You don't say to the grocer down the, down, down at the grocery store, you are the Holy One. You don't call the local, the local school teacher, not a prophet but the Prophet, which was a special name. And these are all titles that were put on Jesus, by people who came face to face with Him as a mystery. As a mystery. And so, we are in the middle, when we are with Jesus, we are in the middle of incomprehensible mystery. People argue and fight, they literally have killed each other by the million in Christianity, over who's view of Jesus is accurate. Who really has the accurate view of Jesus.

The reality is, when you are dealing with mystery on this scale, all words can do is point. They do not control the mystery, nor they, do they in any way communicate the fullness of the mystery. You know, in the Visentine church, my church, Catholic and Orthodox, there are not seven sacraments. The word sacrament is not used. What's, what's used, and used before the word sacrament ever came into existence, they're called the seven holy mysteries. The holy mysteries. The seven holy mysteries. You receive communion, you are not doing something that is going to validate your little two by four world. Not your little two by four world of self, nation, or church. You are entering into the awesome and incomprehensible mystery of Christ, God in Christ, Christ in God within reality, and within you. You are entering, you're encountering divine mystery, and that's what happens with baptism, with confession, etcetera. The seven holy mysteries.

Now, it is only when we, it is only when we become realists, it is only when we give up the illusion of the two by four world, and parenthetically the way we do that, the only way we do that, is by prayer. Prayer in the presence of the mystery of God. Prayer that simply is used to, to validate or justify our little two by four world, will never do it. We personally, as incomprehensible mysteries even to ourselves, go before Jesus Christ, God, and open ourselves as mystery in front of mystery. And so, in prayer we are in the presence of the mystery of God, we are in the presence of the mystery of Jesus. However, it is in this context and only in this context, which is reality, that Jesus as the lamb of God makes any sense. The lamb of God is about the mystery of God in Christ, coming to us. And communicating the way in which we are to live in the midst of this enormous mystery in which God put us.

A man, a biblical theologian that I will be quoting over the next, next week, and it would be wonderful if you ever got a chance to read his works, is the priest, Catholic priest, John L. Mackenzie. Now John L. Mackenzie is, in my mind, the, and certainly in the minds of all kinds of other people who are knowledgeable in the field, probably the premier, or at least one of the premier, if you can say that biblical theologians in the Catholic church in 20th century. For example, I just mention this parenthetically to you,

the most prestigious society of biblical scholars in the world is something called the Society of Biblical Literature. There's only a few people, scholars, in it. They are elected into it, and it's a worldwide organization. John Mackenzie was the first Catholic priest ever to be elected president of it. Any extraordinary mind, and a, made a tremendous contribution to the study of scripture in the Catholic church.

Mackenzie talking about the theme of the lamb of God, the notion of the lamb of God in the New Testament, says that references to the lamb of God in the New Testament are so numerous as to be uncountable. In other words, in the Gospel of John, we have the explicit pointing out by John of Jesus after his baptism. There goes, or behold, the lamb of God. But the lamb of God represents a theme in the New Testament. The lamb of God, in the New Testament, is the theme of Jesus as the suffering servant. Jesus as the suffering servant. It is the same exact reality, the lamb of God, the one who suffers, innocently dies in order to save, is the theme of the suffering servant in the New Testament, and therefore what Mackenzie is saying is, that references to the theme of the suffering servant in the New Testament are so numerous as to be uncountable.

Who is the suffering servant? The suffering servant is a character, a person, in the book of Isaiah. It is a poem. It begins with Isaiah 42:1. It is a poem about a person, and interestingly enough, the poem, the language in the poem, can allow an interpretation that is not about a person, but about a community. Scholars tell us that that, that is intentional. The communication is meant to be that this is a person, but it's also a community at some point. The suffering servant is a poem about a person that is innocent, that is meek, that is non-violent, that is gentle, and that is crushed by evil. And he responds to this being crushed by evil, not as the world responds by retaliating to evil with evil, but he responds to being crushed by evil with good, and somehow, somehow, through the mystery and the working of God, this person, who everyone thinks is doing the wrong thing, indeed who people think are evil, who people think are wasting in his life and time...

SIDE 2

...and somehow, and somehow, somehow, through the mystery and the workings of God, this person, who everyone things is doing the wrong thing, indeed who people think are evil, who people think are wasting in his life and time, somehow, this innocent, gentle person, this non-violent person, will, who responds to evil with good, saves the world. Not just Israel, but the world.

When Jesus is baptized, in all three gospels, in the fourth gospel it only tells that he was baptized and John says after Jesus' baptism, he says there goes the lamb of God, or behold the lamb of God, but in the other three gospels, the narrator has told the story, and in all three gospels, when Jesus, Matthew, Mark and Luke, when Jesus comes out of the water, he, a dove speaks, or a voice from Heaven speaks, and the words are the same in all three gospels. Exact, exactly the same. When Jesus comes out of the water after baptism, He hears the words "This is my beloved Son, my chosen one", or "my favorite one, in whom I am well pleased, listen to Him". Why that is important is, biblical

scholars tells universally the same thing – those words are a direct reference to the opening line of the hymn of the suffering servant. When Jesus is baptized, and he arises from the water, the communication from God that is made to Him is that you are the suffering servant of Israel and of the world. You are the lamb of God.

Interestingly enough, in the passage that we just heard last Sunday in the gospel, and which we will hear again on August 6th, the passage of the transfiguration, when Jesus is for a moment shown to the apostles, Peter, James and John, in all His glory as God, it is the same words that are given, the words of the opening line of the hymn of the suffering servant. God's glory, God's life, is in the lamb of God. God's life, the way that God is, is the way the suffering servant is. And so, Jesus at his baptism comes out of the water, and hears this is my Son, my favorite one, my chosen one, in whom I am well pleased. And He knows what His mission is. He knows that He is called to be the innocent, gentle, non-violent person returning good for evil, in a world of evil, who will not be appreciated for doing it, but that through whom God will save all people till the ends of the Earth. It is the suffering servant who is the lamb of God. The lamb of God is the suffering servant. As a matter of fact, in Jesus' own language, Aramaic, Galilean Aramaic, servant and lamb would have been the same word.

Let me read you, for a moment, because you may not be that familiar with it, let me read you just the opening verse, and then the closing verse, of the poem of the hymn of the suffering servant. From Isaiah 42:1, and then, and then just the last, the, the, the last section. It is called the servant's song, the song of the suffering servant, it begins:

“The Lord says here is my servant, in whom I am pleased, my chosen one, whom I have strengthened. I have filled him with my spirit. He will bring righteousness to every nation. He will not shout or raise his voice or make loud speeches in the streets. He will not break off a bent reed, or put out a flickering lamp. He will bring lasting righteousness to all, he will not lose hope or courage. He will establish righteousness on the Earth. Distant lands eagerly await for his teaching.”

And then we go, that's the end of that section there, and then we go to the final section of the poem, which is Isaiah 52:13, and listen to this, and listen how this almost parallels the passion of Jesus. In fact, there was a time when scripture scholars actually thought that the passion of Jesus as we have it in the gospel didn't really occur. That is, not that Jesus didn't die and suffer a passion, but that those who were communicating in the gospels were trying to communicate so totally that Jesus was the suffering servant, that they arranged the details of the cruc-, passion and crucifixion to match the passage. Well, today we know that is not so, but it, wait till you see the passage, and you'll see how totally the suffering servant matches the work of Jesus on Earth. Isaiah 52:13 begins:

“The Lord says, my servant will succeed in his task, and he will be highly honored. Many people were shocked when they saw him. He was so disfigured, that he hardly looked human. How many nations will marvel at him, and kings will be speechless with amazement. They will see and understand something they have never known. The people reply, who would have believed what we now report. Who could have seen the Lord's

hand in this? It was the will of the Lord that his servant should grow like a plant, taking root in dry ground. He had no dignity nor beauty to make us take notice of him. There was nothing attractive about him, nothing that would draw us to him. We despised him, and rejected him, and he endured suffering and pain. No one would even look at him. We ignored him as if he were nothing. But he endured the suffering that should have been ours, the pain that we should have borne. And all the while, we thought that his suffering was punishment sent by God. But because of our sins, he was wounded. Beaten because of the evil we did. We are healed by the punishment he suffered. We are made whole by the blows he received. All of us were like sheep that were lost. Each of us going his own way. But the Lord made the punishment fall on him. The punishment all of us deserved. He was treated harshly, but endured it humbly. He never said a word, like a lamb are led to be slaughtered, like a sheep to be sheared, he never said a word. He was arrested, and sentenced, and led off to die. No one cared about his fate. He was put to death, for the sins of our people. He was placed in a grave with violent men. He was buried with the rich, even though he never committed a crime, or ever told a lie. The Lord says, it was my will that he should suffer. His death was a sacrifice to bring forgiveness. And so, he will see his descendants, and he will live a long life, and through him my purposes will succeed. After a life of suffering, he will again have joy. He will know that he did not suffer in vain. My devoted servant, with whom I am pleased, will bear the punishments of many, for his sake I will forgive them. And so, I will give him a place of honor, a place among great and powerful men. He willingly gave his life and shared the fate of evil men. He took the place of many sinners, and prayed that they might be forgiven.”

And that’s the end of the poem. This is the lamb of God. This is Jesus, the suffering servant. This is the one who suffers innocently, returns good for evil, and somehow, through the mystery of God saves the world. When we are baptized as Christians, we are baptized into the same baptism as Jesus. We are baptized into Jesus, the suffering servant, the lamb of God. Our mission, and Jesus’ mission, is the same. We are called to be what Jesus was and is, we are called to what Jesus did. We are baptized into the lamb of God, into returning good for evil, into doing things Jesus’ way, doing things God’s way, in order to be what the church calls participants in the co-redemption of the world.

You know baptism is the Greek word for total immersion. That’s what it means, in Greek. Baptism means total immersion. Therefore, in most of the churches of the East, Catholic and Orthodox, and in many of the churches in the West, the Protestant churches, when people are baptized, as Jesus was baptized, they are totally immersed under water, one hundred percent. And so, the symbolism is real, that you totally turn your life over, you totally immerse your life in Christ. But the, but the Christ you’re immersing your life in is the Christ who was baptized in the river Jordan, and when he arose out of that baptism, arose to the consciousness that he was the lamb of God, the suffering servant of Israel. Arose to the consciousness that his mission was not to be a political power on the face of the Earth, not to be a king or a prime minister or a general, not to live according to the values of the world, but to live by the values of God, which was the value that love, struggle to love, pay the price to love, even those who were destroying him. Remember, I think it was, was John, the sons of Zebede. They were for the two places next to Jesus in the gospel. One of the gospels, it’s there mother asking for the two place next to Jesus in

his glory. They're thinking Jesus is going to be something like a political revolutionary, that's going to climb to the top of the heap, and they want the two powerful seats next to the king. And Jesus says, that I can't give you, but can you be baptized in the baptism that I am baptized in, and what baptism is Jesus baptized in? The baptism of the lamb of God, the baptism of the suffering servant.

Said technically the way scripture scholars say it, Jesus as suffering servant is the original identification of Jesus in the gospel, and in history. It is an identification of who Jesus was, that comes out of his own consciousness. Other identifications like Messiah and Christ and so forth, Son of God, Lord, these are all identifications placed on him by the community. But this one, Jesus as the suffering servant, the lamb of God, comes to him at his baptism, to him – it's the first identification of Jesus in who he is, the suffering servant, the gentle, non-violent, kind person who suffers innocently and even loves those who are doing him evil, destroying him. And through that process people are saved.

Now, that is not the way the world works and you know it. The beatitude teaches blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Does it look to you, today or any time in history, that the meek are inheriting the earth? It is not, it is the tough, it is the powerful, it is the greedy. They can't get their hands on enough. They can't have enough people working to support their luxury. There's ever more need to oppress ever more people. It is the powerful that inherit the earth from our eye view. Jesus says blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. The lamb is obviously meek. God tells Jesus at the moment he comes out of his baptism, he tells him you are now totally immersed in the meekness of the suffering servant. This is your life. How's that possible? The world that the tough and the powerful and the hard and the greedy and the oppressors, and those for whom too much is not enough, the world that the powerful inherit is the little two by four world. The tiny world, the world that is but a speck of the enormous immensity of reality, and the God behind it. The only world they inherit is a little piece of dirt that will perish like the blade of grass.

In the New Testament, the nation, every nation, without exception, is totally perishable, no nation will be redeemed – that is, no nation will be given eternal life. Every nation will perish like a blade of grass. For the nation is that little two by four world, and what God is concerned about, and what God is concerned about in Jesus is the infinite mystery of billions upon billions of human souls, in the context of the extraordinary mystery of existence and the mystery of God. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth – and what is the earth? Not a nation, not a state – the earth is the grandeur and glory of God, and all that that is manifest. They will inherit the mystery of existence.

Jesus tells us that the one that tries to save his life in this world will lose it, but the one who loses his life for my sake, will save it. The one who tries to save the little two by four world by doing anything and everything that Jesus rejected, will lose life. But the one who follows the lamb of God will have life in abundance, the fullness of life, the super abundance of life. The entire mystery of reality in God will be his or hers. To follow the suffering servant, to follow the lamb of God, is not foolishness, is not folly. Do you realize that in every Eucharistic consecratory prayer since the beginning of the

church, to this very hour, every church, east and west, every consecratory prayer has contained language word for word out of the hymn of the suffering servant?

John L. Mackenzie, who I mentioned earlier, refers to the Eucharist as the celebration of the community of the suffering servant. How can you celebrate being a doormat? How can you celebrate being a nobody in world? How can you celebrate not returning evil for evil? Returning good for evil, and so forth? You can't celebrate it if the mind is just a little two by four world. But in the consciousness of the massiveness of reality, and God working through Jesus, the mystery of God working through the mystery of Jesus, you can celebrate it because you are entering into that mystery that God says 500 years before Jesus in the hymn of the suffering servant, you are entering into the mystery that will bring eternal salvation to all nations, all people. That's the celebration.

God does not ever, ever come from the barrel of a gun. God never, never, never comes out of a mouth, or from a tongue, that is doing gossip, talking lies, talking hatred. God comes as the lamb of God, gentle, meek, kind, doing good, doing good, doing good, to friends and to enemies, regardless of the cost. This is the lamb of God. This is who we adore. This is who we pray to. This is who we imitate, this is who we imitate. There really is a choice. Jesus is the lamb of God, the Jesus we receive in the Eucharist is the lamb of God. Is a victim of the two by four world. Jesus is a victim of the little worlds that people create, and which they will defend to the point of destroying other people who threaten them. Little two by four worlds that will perish regardless of how hard they defend them. Jesus is a victim of that consciousness in people. Jesus is, but he is a victim who to the very last moment of his death is trying to serve even those who are victimizing him – Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. He is praying for those who are destroying him, he's making excuses for them so God will save them. And we must assume his prayers will be heard.

And so, when we are baptized into Christ, we are baptized into Jesus as suffering servant, as the lamb of God. We are totally immersed in that reality, and therefore, that day in day out consciousness of identity with Christ as the lamb of God, should govern our activities with our family, with our children in the grocery store, with the other sisters in the convent, with the brother priest or brothers, in the rectory, with the people on the streetcar, with the person at the job. I know in the little two by four world it looks like folly. The lamb of God looks like folly, it looks like foolishness. Not to strike back, with the tongue or with the fist or with the gun, or with the clever plan. I know it appears like folly, to be like a lamb, and when people hurt to respond with good. I know the cross and the lamb, the central symbols at Knoch look absolutely positively foolish in the little two by four world, of nations, of diplomacy, of greed, of power – basically the two by four world of fear. But Saint Paul says, that lamb and that cross and the tremendous mystery of existence and the tremendous mystery of human history, and the tremendous mystery of the God behind human history, that cross and that lamb, are not folly, they are the power and the wisdom of God for the salvation of all.