

The Divine Service: Pax Domini & Agnus Dei

4th-7th C.

P The peace of the Lord be with you always.

John 20:19

C Amen.

C O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
have mercy upon us.

O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
grant us Thy peace. Amen.

John 1:29

Immediately following the consecration, the Words of our Lord having made him present in his body and blood, for the forgiveness of our sins, the pastor extends the host and the cup to the congregation, pronouncing, "The peace of the Lord be with you always," and the congregation responds, "Amen." This *Pax Domini* (peace of the Lord) might be traced to our Lord's words on the day of his resurrection, when he appeared among his disciples, bearing the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation, with the words, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19-29) As he showed his hands and side to the disciples and even invited Thomas to probe his wounds, that they might be sure, so he gives you even more: his body and blood to you, to make you certain of the forgiveness of your sins. The *Pax Luther* (in explaining his Wittenberg order for Mass) calls "a public absolution of the sins of the communicants; the true voice of the Gospel announcing the forgiveness of sins; and therefore the one and most worthy preparation for the Lord's Table, if faith holds to these words as coming from the mouth of Christ Himself."

The congregation responds to the *Pax Domini's* proclamation of an at-hand Jesus, ready to save, with not only the "Amen," "Yes, yes, it shall be so," but also the *Agnus Dei* (Lamb of God...). Whence come these words? (John 1:29-34) Who spoke them first? What occasioned them? How are they an especially fitting response to the proclamation of the *Pax*?

At the same time, the *Agnus Dei* connects us to the picture of the whole Church's worship given us in Revelation 5. Who is there in the midst of the throne, the focus of worship by "angels and archangels and all the company of heaven"? On what key person and act is even heaven's worship focused?

Luther highly valued the *Agnus Dei* and retained it, too, in his order of the Mass. It remains prominent in the Lutheran Divine Service (as it is, tellingly, absent from many other confessions' worship) as an expression of our belief, on the sound basis of Christ's own words, that he comes to us in reality, in flesh and blood, to take away our sins in the Sacrament. "O Christ, Thou Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world, grant us Thy peace. Amen."