

Behold the Lamb 3

Last week's reflection concluded with a reference to *our religious language about Jesus as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world* (John 1:29). Did anything strike you as different in that passage from St. John's Gospel? Did you note the use of the singular *sin of the world*, rather than the plural *sins of the world* as we pray it right before communion at Mass? As noted in the first of these reflections, these reflections are based on an article by the scripture scholar Sandra Schneiders, titled *The Lamb of God and the Forgiveness of Sin(s) in the Fourth Gospel*. The seemingly small difference between the singular "sin" and plural "sins" in fact reflects a very significant difference of meaning. As noted, in the beginning of John's gospel, John the Baptist proclaims Jesus to be the one who takes away *the sin of the world*. But at the end of the gospel Jesus commissions his disciples to forgive the *sins* of the world: *As the Father has sent me, so I send you.... Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained* (20:23). What's the difference? What is the "sin of the world" that Jesus takes away, and what are the "sins of the world" the Church is to forgive? The basic difference is that the sin of the world Jesus comes to take away is a *condition*, rather than an *act*. Sin in the Gospel of John, and most broadly understood throughout our Catholic tradition, is not just a narrow concept that refers to violations of religious law or moral norms, either by single individuals or larger groups. These would be the "sins" of the world. Rather, the "sin of the world" refers to what we traditionally call "original sin", which is not called original because it came first in the history of sin, but because of how it is the root or source of all other sin and sins in the world. And just what is the nature of character of such sin, beyond any single act or action, be it by Adam, Eve, or any of us?

**Please let us know what else about our faith tradition you'd like to find out more about.
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