

Behold the Lamb 2: Domesticating the Lion

Yes, Jesus is at once Lion and Lamb, our Almighty Creator and Redeemer who surrendered to our sin and its consequence of death. The Lion became the Lamb.

Yet His sacrifice makes little sense if we fail to comprehend who He is as Lion. Literary images help. In his 'children's' books on Narnia, C.S. Lewis tells us more about the God who roars with love than a host of philosophical tomes. There we discover Aslan who is always good but not safe, the God who never harms us but who allows us to hurt in order to become whole. Lewis gives us a King Cat with claws who upholds us but eludes our comfortable, controlling grasp of Him. His thoroughly masculine love is endowed with power to win us over; as He dies to pledge Himself to us, He commands a choice--will we pledge ourselves to Him?

In brief, Aslan is exciting. He does more than personify a sacrificial death. He becomes One worth dying for. Why then are our images of God so banal, so dull, as dimensional as perfect, pastel cards of the saints?

Lewis' friend Dorothy Sayers writes: 'So that is the outline of the official story—the tale of the time that God was the underdog and got beaten...became a man like the men He made, and these men broke Him and killed Him. This is the dogma we find so dull—this terrifying drama of which God is both victim and hero...If this is dull, then what, in Heaven's name, is worthy to be called exciting? The people who hanged Jesus never accused Him of being a bore; they thought Him too dynamic to be safe. It has been left for later generations to muffle up that shattering personality and surround Him with an atmosphere of tedium. We have very efficiently pared the claws of the Lion of Judah, certified Him meek and mild, and recommended Him as a fitting household pet for pale curates and pious old ladies.'

As a 7-year-old Catholic, I must confess that my greatest grief with the historic Church is that many who surround me seem dead to their own inheritance. That we process dully to feast on the Lion who became the Lamb to gain us, shedding neither a tear nor leaping for joy, amazes me. I want to cry out: HE is here! HE wants you! You need not feed on garbage; EAT GOD!

Or maybe many of my peers have never been alive to Him. Yes, maybe aware of their family tradition, or a vague peace in participating in the familiar ritual. But never really knowing Him! I recall my friend, the son of a well-known Catholic healer, recounting why he became an evangelical: 'I grew up Catholic but was clueless to who Jesus was. I needed a Baptist to make clear to me what the Cross was all about.' Another 'cradle' Catholic: 'I always appreciated the sacraments but understood them only in the light of Love, the truth that Jesus died and rose again to have a personal relationship with me.'

Archbishop Vigneron of Detroit writes in his splendid pastoral letter, 'Unleash the Gospel': 'The core message of the Gospel can only be proclaimed effectively by a first-hand witness, one who

has met the Lord personally and can speak of what He is doing in one's life.' We need 'a radical openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit' if we are 'to invite every person into the fullness of life that is found in Jesus Christ alone.'

So we repent on behalf of our churches who claim to gather around the One but who often fail to light the fire of Jesus in our hearts.

'Sorry God for concealing You in our abstractions and paring Your claws. In our dullness we have hidden You from those who will perish without You. Forgive us for contributing to a tidy Church for the obliging rather than an exciting, messy place of encounter between sinners and the Lion who became a Lamb to win us over. We ask for mercy to forgive church 'faces' who failed to make You known; set us on fire with Your blazing love. May we not lose time bemoaning our church 'misses' when You have ignited us to become ministers of Your unfailing Love.'