scroll revealing the hidden and final purposes of God and to bring them to completion. The Lamb is also the Lion(!) of Judah, the one who shepherds the people and he receives worship and honour and glory. The Lamb is given the honour due to God because he is God and is praised because he has won victory and salvation. (Revelation Chapter 5 verses 1-10)

During Mass we pray that the Lamb of God will have mercy on us and give us peace. In asking Jesus to have mercy on us as the one who is the Lamb we are expressing our solidarity with all the world – whose sins he takes away. We are recalling that the gift of the Eucharist both in the offering of Christ's sacrifice and in receiving spiritual nourishment for our journey takes away our sins. Communion brings our peace and forgiveness. It is very important to approach Holy Communion at peace with God and others and we understand that this comes to full effect in our receiving so great a gift.

Q *Try saying the words of the Lamb of God slowly and silently as a prayer.*
How might we help others appreciate this title of Jesus more fully?

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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Liturgy Office
England & Wales

Roman Missal, 3rd Edition
Looking at the text 8

The peace of the Lord be with you always.
And with your spirit.

Let us offer each other the sign of peace.

The Sign of Peace

Why don't we have the sign of Peace at the beginning of Mass to show that we want to be friends with each other and that we are sorry for any hurt we have done? Surely this is what Jesus is talking about when he says that if we approach the altar while not at peace with our brother or sister then we should leave and be reconciled first. (Matthew Chapter 5 verse 23-24).

It is true that as we come to Mass we should seek forgiveness and be reconciled with those around us. For this reason we have the Penitential Rite at the start of Mass. Are we thinking about this again as we offer each other the Sign of Peace?

The real idea behind the Sign of Peace is recalled in the prayer that comes before it. This speaks of Jesus' own words about peace. He said 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives (John Chapter 14 verse 27). This peace we cannot give to each other; only he can give it. It is a special kind of peace.

Christ's Peace is not only about human beings making up in reconciliation. We know that the Hebrew word for peace is 'shalom' but this greeting that was used every day had a special meaning when spoken by the Messiah.

His 'Shalom' is not just a standard greeting said without thinking. His 'Shalom is the gift of everlasting peace, the gift of salvation.

In ancient times the question was asked why we don't have the Sign of Peace earlier in our Mass so that we can show our willingness to forgive each other. Pope Innocent I wrote in 416AD, 'it is clear that by the Peace the people give their consent to everything that has been performed in the mysteries and celebrated in church, and acknowledge their completion by the seal of the concluding Peace'.

This gesture in the Communion Rite emphasises that what we share is Christ's Peace celebrated at every Mass. It is his salvation won for us by his death and resurrection and made present to us on the altar during the Eucharistic Prayer. The Sign of Peace is more than a simple 'wish you well'. As we say to each other 'Peace', 'the Peace of Christ', or similar words, what we share is a gift from Jesus. There is a great solemnity to it and a deep joy. This is not about trying to shake everybody's hand or including lengthy singing about peace. It is like Holy Communion itself; it is a most profound moment shown under the simplest signs.

Q *Think about what the Sign of Peace means to you. How can we emphasise that it is Christ's peace that share in this sign?*

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace.

The Lamb of God

This line occurs in different places at the Mass. It is found in the Gloria 'Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us', and we sing or say it at as the sacred Host is broken. The Lamb, of course, is Jesus. We declare this clearly as the priest says 'Behold the Lamb of God' before Communion. There is a rich understanding behind the phrase 'Lamb of God' who takes away the sins of the world. It appears in many places in the scriptures.

Lambs were killed and eaten at the first Passover and their blood was put around the doors of the Israelites to protect them from the last of the ten plagues. Ever since lambs were eaten at Passover celebrations as part of sharing in God's saving work described in Exodus. According to Saint John's Gospel Jesus was put to death at about the same time that the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. John is telling us that Jesus is the one whose blood saves all people and this is the heart of the Christian Passover.

Lambs were offered in sacrifice regularly to atone for sin and to express the bond between God and his people. Innocent sheep and meek lambs dumb before the shearers are compared to the servant of God who suffers without protest for the people (Isaiah Chapter 53 verse 7). We see in Jesus a fulfilment of these images.

In the book of Revelation the Lamb that was slain is the one who opens the seals on the