

*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: have mercy on us.*

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*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world: grant us peace.*

This much loved prayer is one of the oldest in Christian worship. John the Baptist spoke the first *Agnus Dei* (Latin for “Lamb of God”) as a prophetic word, testifying to the man before him (John 1:19). We repeat his proclamation and add to it our supplication, leaning on Christ’s mercy and hoping for his peace.

This prayer’s use in worship began in the private prayers of Eastern Christian communities, but it soon spread to Rome and the West. It was originally repeated over and over again during the breaking of the bread until all the bread was broken.

Early in the middle ages, the people took communion less frequently, and the prayer was only said three times. Soon after, it became tied to the exchange of the peace. At that time, the final response was changed from “Have mercy upon us” to “Grant us thy peace.”

Its core phrase remains a part of our communion service after the Lord’s Prayer. There we acknowledge Jesus’ role as the sacrificial offering for our sins, and we express our utter dependence on divine mercy.

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*Image: Apse Mosaic - Agnus Dei. Santa Cecilia in Trastevere, Rome*