

# Baculus Pastoralis

Blessed Ildefonso Cardinal Schuster  
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HOLY SATURDAY  
 ( Collecta at the Lateran for the Catechumens. )

In olden days the paschal feast was very strict, extending from the evening of Good Friday until the dawn of Easter Sunday. In Rome not even children were dispensed from this fast. For this reason Mass was not celebrated on this day, as the whole Church was watching in devout expectation until the night should come in which the mystery of Christ's resurrection should be celebrated.

Early in the morning of Holy Saturday at the Lateran the archdeacon, having melted some wax, mixed it with chrism, blessed it and poured it into various oval moulds, on which was impressed the figure of the mystical Lamb of God. These *Agnus Dei* were afterwards distributed to the faithful at the Mass on Saturday *in Albis*, as tokens and mementos of the paschal solemnity.

Out of Rome, in places where there still survived the ancient rite of the evening *Lucernarium* and of the blessing of the paschal candle, the wax from which the *Agnus Dei* was formed was that which remained over from the making of the great candle destined to light up the ambo on the night of Easter. As Rome, however, only consented later on to adopt this rite of the paschal *Lucernarium*, in order to conform to the custom which had been steadily spreading since the fifth century, of distributing the waxen *Agnus Dei* to the people, the making of them was entrusted to the archdeacon. We should note that in Rome these papal tokens had no connection at all with the paschal candle, as they had in other churches.

In the late Middle Ages the significance and advantages of these *Agnus Dei* are described in the following Leonine verses:

Balsamus et munda cera cum chrismatis unda  
 Conficiunt Agnum, quod munus do tibi magnum,  
 Fonte velut natum, per mystica sanctificatum,  
 Fulgura desursum pellit et omne malignum.  
 Peccatum frangit, ut Christi sanguis et angit.

Pregnans servatur, simul et partus liberator.  
 Munera fert dignis, virtutem destruit ignis.  
 Portatus munde, de fluctibus eripit undæ.  
 Morte repentina servat, Satanæque ruina.  
 Si quis honorat eum retinet super hostem trophæum.  
 Parsque minor tantum, tota valet integra quantum.

Agnus Dei, miserere mei.  
 Qui crimina tollis, miserere nobis.

Of balm and purest wax mixed with chrism  
 The precious Lamb is made, which now I give to you,  
 As though born at the font and blessed by secret prayer,  
 It shields you from the thunderbolt and from every harm.  
 It breaks the bonds of sin, and wars against the power of  
 evil as does the Blood of Christ.  
 The woman in childbirth is preserved and safely delivered.  
 It gives grace to those who are worthy, and quenches flame.  
 Worn with devotion it saves from the dangers of the deep.  
 It preserves from sudden death and from Satan's snare.  
 He who holds it in honour shall triumph over the enemy.  
 And a small fragment of the *Agnus Dei* will have as much  
 efficacy as the whole.  
 Lamb of God, have pity on me.  
 Thou who takest away the sins of the world, have mercy  
 upon us.

For some centuries now the blessing of the *Agnus Dei* has been reserved to the Popes, by whom it is solemnly conferred at the beginning and in every successive fifth year of their Pontificate.