

Japanese professional baseball traces its roots back to the 1930s.

You may or may not know this, but there are twelve teams, broken into two leagues.

The team mascots in Japanese baseball fall into two categories: normal and bizarre.

Sure you've got the Stars, the Tigers, the Giants, the Lions, the Eagles, and the Dragons. But how seriously can you take yourself when you're drafted to the Buffalos, or the Carp, or even the Swallows.

There are a couple of teams that initially sound good, like the Fighters and the Marines. But the Marine's mascot is a six-foot tall Seagull; and the Fighter's mascot is a pink, fuzzy pterodactyl named "Fighty."

Certain animals conjure up all sorts of images for us. Your coworker can be a real bear ... but if he's a teddy bear - the meaning changes. If the new boss is a bobcat, look out ... but if he's a kitten - hey, no problem. At a night club, a young man with puppy dog eyes is probably not going to meet up with a young lady who's described as a real dog.

In today's Gospel we hear John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus - following Our Lord's baptism by John in the Jordan River.

Jesus was a carpenter - the Greek word means something more like "builder" or "construction worker." We know through other Gospel stories that Our Lord was not a push-over. He drove the money-changers out of the temple with a whip ... all the while knocking over their tables and sending stuff flying in all directions.

And after what we heard in last week's Gospel - the Baptism of Jesus - the sky opens, God's voice is heard, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove.

Pretty powerful stuff.

And then today, we hear John talking about Jesus and he calls him "the Lamb of God."

Huh? Was this some sort of ancient Japanese expansion team based out of Israel? It almost seems ridiculous. A lamb is not very strong, clever, fast, or good-looking. Yet in today's Gospel, and throughout the New Testament ... and all over the prayers of the Mass ... we hear "Lamb of God."

In the Jewish tradition, there is one place where the lamb is very important - and that was the night of the Passover.

In a show of power, God was going to send the Angel of Death to kill the first-born sons of every man or beast throughout Egypt. With the exception of those whose homes were marked over the doorposts with the blood of the Passover lamb.

This was such an enormous event, that the Jews commemorate it every year - and have done so for over 3,400 years.

The Passover Lamb saved the Israelites from the wrath of God, and sent the Egyptians reeling so that Israel could escape into the desert ... and eventually enter the Promised Land.

John the Baptist's prophetic statement in today's Gospel foreshadow's the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross ... the sacrifice that saves us from eternal death ... and brings us into a family bond with God Himself - the Most Holy Trinity.

Just a few weeks ago, we marveled at the birth of Jesus Christ - the Son of God ... the Second Person of the Trinity - as a baby. That God would endure so much for our salvation - should leave us reeling in amazement.

Today, as we approach this altar to receive the Sacred Body and Blood, Soul and Divinity of Jesus Christ; let us pray for a deeper understanding of His sacrifice for us - but not "us" collectively ... but each one of us ... Christ's sacrifice for YOU.

And let us reflect on our own role within the "animal" Kingdom of God. Ask yourself - are you strong enough ... brave enough - to identify with Jesus Christ? Are you tough enough to follow the Lamb of God and allow His sacrifice to transform who you are ... into who you are supposed to be? A holy child of God, redeemed in the Blood of the Lamb.

Are you strong enough to ... submit? to the Will of God? to the Love of God? Are you willing ... and able ... to let God's Holy Spirit dwell within you ... every moment ... of every day?

"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world."