

Passion Sunday 2021

“By his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.”

**In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.
Amen.**

My text this morning is based on Saint Paul’s Epistle to the Hebrews. Although one of the shorter lessons in the Prayer Book, it says much about sacrifice, and specifically Our Lord’s own death on the Cross. As the title suggests, the Book of Hebrews was written for Jews that had converted to Christianity. We undertook a detailed study of this Book in one of our Sunday studies a few years back. And if you recall, one detail that stood out is that this was a letter written to people who were biblically literate. This makes sense even today, as Hebrews is a difficult Book to understand unless you have a good knowledge of the Old Testament. Because of this, it is not an Epistle frequently preached on. When it is, it’s usually references those looking for a better land, or having a “great cloud of witnesses” about us, or how “faith is the substance of things hoped for.”

This morning I want us to focus on the message of sacrifice, beginning with the Old Testament system and ending with a new type of sacrifice; a sacrifice that would redeem mankind.

In our King James Bible, it mentions the blood of bulls and goats.

Other translations, goats and calves. To us, it really doesn't matter as long as we understand that some living thing had to be sacrificed.

In the sacrificial system, blood cleansed things. Our normal reaction is to wash something if it is stained with blood. But the ancients

believed this sprinkling with the blood of a sacrificial animal

cleansed-not in the sense of sanitation, for they knew little and cared

even less about what we'd today consider sanitary. No, this blood

cleanses in the sense of holiness.

In Israel, the blood of bulls and goats was sprinkled and poured out

for the cleansing of the guilt of sins according to the Law of Moses as

handed down by God.

But Saint Paul speaks of a "better" blood; a blood which does more

and cleanses better than the Old Testament sacrifices. It is, of

course, the Blood of Christ.

The Epistle speaks to those who would understand the High Priest

talk and sacrificial system and its meaning. If we want to appreciate

what Hebrews is saying here, we must be able to make the same sort

of connection in our minds that they would have made. The

comparison here is between the heavenly and the earthly. Paul tells

us that Christ entered as High Priest into the greater and more perfect tabernacle, one not of this creation. It was in fact, a heavenly tabernacle. The tabernacle of Moses and Temple of Solomon then, were merely earthly representations of the heavenly tabernacle.

This is the tabernacle Our Lord enters into. The very presence of God the Father, having made atonement for our sins. The entire life of Our Lord from his Conception, through his suffering, death, and burial-are all part of that atoning sacrifice.

Think of it like this: The Cross as the Altar of Sacrifice. It was the blood of Our Lord Christ, shed for us that gave meaning to those animal sacrifices throughout the ages.

They all looked forward to the Christ for their meaning and substance. It was, in fact, the Lamb of God sacrificed on the altar of the Cross that made the Passover Lamb significant-that caused God to choose the Lamb for that sacrifice, and to name the Lamb as the Sacrifice for Yom kippur-the day of Atonement each year.

You see, it didn't work the other way around. The Jewish sacrificial system did not give meaning and substance to what Jesus was doing- He was the meaning and substance of the Jewish sacrificial system.

He was the meaning of every Holy Day, and every offering, and every Sabbath.

By the cross Jesus entered the presence of God with the blood of the sacrifice just as every High Priest had done since Aaron.

As we look around this church today, every purple veil is a reminder of the Sacrifice of Christ on the Cross. This will become more evident in the lessons and liturgies during the next two weeks.

When we think of the person of Jesus Christ, we often forget that he was just that, a person, a human being too. It is much easier to see his divinity but ignoring his humanness.

Imagine for a moment how the foreknowledge of his death must have weighed on his mind. Perhaps from his childhood as he reminded Mary and Joseph that he must be about His Father's business.

Knowing he had come into the world to bear the sins of every man, woman, and child, must have been an imaginably heavy burden for him. Certainly, the expectation that on his shoulders rested the destiny of countless billions of people.

But let's not forget the sacrifices made prior to the cross; what we might call his sacrificial life. His daily walk was an example of the Golden Rule, doing for others what we would have them do for us. As

Our Lord says for himself, “The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.”

Thus, his life was dedicated to exhausting himself through giving to others. The Gospel accounts relate occasion after occasion when he preached, or healed, or cast out demons; how he comforted everyone who came to him for help.

But there were other sacrifices as well: He never married or experienced the rewards of family life. Likewise, he sacrificed things that most people prize as good and worthy such as ambition, wealth, prestige, position, popularity, and many other elements of success. He had the wherewithal within himself to attain any of these pinnacles of human achievement, but he shunned them all for the greater reward before him. As Paul would later write in this same Epistle, “Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, desiring the shame, and has sat down at the Right hand of the throne of God.”

He considered his many fleshly sacrifices nothing compared to the tremendous future he would enjoy in the Kingdom of God.”

Something for us to ponder as our Lenten journey nears its end.

Sacrifice is not a concept that anyone really enjoys. As ironic as it sounds we will make sacrifices in one area to circumvent having to make sacrifice in another. This points out the human tendency to hold some part of our lives closer and dearer than others-and we are loathe to let go of even a small bit of what we love the most. But Jesus did not live this way. His human life was all about sacrifice-His entire life was a sacrifice. And his is the life that has been exalted as the perfect pattern for our own.

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

Amen.