

The Homily for the Fifth Sunday in Lent

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of all our hearts be now and always acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our strength and our Redeemer.

Our Lenten journey is fast approaching its final stage, and next Sunday is Palm Sunday, leading into Holy week and our ultimate goal “Easter” is in sight. Lent is a testing time and I pray that you have thus far managed to achieve the goals that you set for yourself, and that you have resolutely followed the example of our Lord Jesus Christ during this Lenten period?

In today’s Epistle reading from **Hebrews 9**, the author draws our attention to the sacrificial system of the Old Testament. Reading from verse 1 it tells us that the first covenant had regulations for worship, and an earthly Sanctuary. A Tabernacle was set up. In its first room were the Lampstand and the Table with its consecrated bread, this was called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a room called the Most Holy Place, which had the golden Altar of Incense and the gold-covered Arc of the Covenant, which contained the gold jar of *manna*, Aaron’s Staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the Covenant given to Moses. Above the Arc were the Cherubim of the Glory, overshadowing the Atonement cover.

Once everything was prepared, the Priests entered into the outer room to carry out their ministry. It was only the High Priest who entered the inner room, and that only once a year, and never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.

The sacrificial system of the Old Testament was a means of grace by which the relationship between God and humanity begins to be restored.

The five Offerings in the Old Testament are;

1. Burnt Offering
2. Grain Offering
3. Peace Offering
4. Sin Offering
5. Guilt Offering.

Ultimately, the sacrificial system was inadequate, as none could repay the debt of life that was owed, until Christ defeated death “**once for all**” (Heb. 10:10).

The Blood of Christ:

But when Jesus Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. *For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled, sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?* And for this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance. The comparison here is between the heavenly and the earthly. Hebrews says that Christ entered as High Priest into the greater and more perfect Tabernacle, one not of this creation. He entered into the heavenly Tabernacle.

The Jews knew that their Tabernacle was an earthly representation, copies if you will, of the heavenly tabernacle.

Jesus entered into this heavenly Tabernacle, the heavenly Holy of Holies - the very presence of God the Father - having made atonement for our sins. The entire life of Jesus - from His conception in the Virgin Mary through His suffering and death and burial - are all part of that atoning sacrifice. The cross was the altar of

sacrifice. It was the blood of the Son of God, shed for us, that gave meaning to the animal sacrifices throughout the ages.

It was by the Cross that Jesus entered the presence of God with the blood of the sacrifice, just as every High Priest had done since Aaron. He did not enter the presence of the Almighty with the covering of the blood of sacrificial goats and calves. He approached God and the justice of God with the covering of His own Blood - the very lifeblood of the Son of God.

If the blood of a mere animal could cleanse and sanctify, so states the author of Hebrews, *how much more does the blood of the very Son of God effect that cleansing and sanctification?*

Today's Gospel reading from St John 8 from vs 48 puts into perspective why Jesus was in conflict with the religious leaders, who were so steeped in the Law of Moses that they became "Spiritually Blind" even to the clearest revelation of the living Word of God and questioned Jesus' teachings.

What Jesus condemned was their "Pharisaism" (hypocrisy), as evidenced by their pride in their outward observance of the law but inward spiritual void, and their arrogant belief that they were more religious than the rest.

They in return accused Jesus of blasphemy (Luke 5:21), of being in league with the devil (Matthew 9:34), and of breaking the law (Matthew 12:2) which prompted them to seek to destroy Him (Matthew 12:14) which after his betrayal would ultimately lead to our Lords crucifixion as foretold in the Old Testament (Isaiah 53:7b) says, *"He was led like a lamb to the slaughter and as a sheep is silent before shearers, He never said a word."*

And as we continue our Lenten journey to Easter, we are reminded that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, to die on the cross for the propitiation of our sins, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.

"For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life He lives, He lives to God. Likewise you also, recon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Courage my brothers and sisters you as you continue your Lenten journey, through Jesus Christ our Lord. May his Holy Name be praised from now unto all eternity.

In the Name of the Father, + and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The Tabernacle of Moses



The High Priest enters the Holy of Holies



The Blood of the Lamb of God

