

Covenant, Sacrifice and The Coming of the Messiah

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten Son from the Father.”

-John 1:14

Prayer before Study

O ineffable Creator, true source of light and wisdom, origin of all things, be pleased to cast a beam of your radiance upon the darkness of my mind.

Take from me the double darkness of sin and ignorance in which I was born. Give me quickness of understanding, a retentive memory, the ability to grasp things correctly and fundamentally, and abundant grace of expression.

Order the beginning, direct the progress and perfect the achievement of my work. You who are true God and true Man and who live and reign forever and ever. Amen.

Mankind after the Fall: Dead in his sins

- From the time of Adam on throughout history, mankind progressed in wickedness and sin: obscuring the image of God
 - The first sin (Original Sin) caused a rupture in the relationship between God and mankind
 - The original holiness, grace and right relationship with God with which Adam and Eve were created was lost
- Man is corrupted or wounded by sin. Because of original sin, his concupiscence (inclination to sin) causes him to commit actual sin, from which he is unable to free himself.
 - The rest of the Genesis account relates the compounding of sin upon sin
 - Increasing wickedness and perversion of mankind by sin

Mankind after the Fall: Dead in his sins

- Man cannot erase his sin by himself
 - The relationship with God is ruptured
 - The bridge is burnt
- Even the best exemplars of faith in the Old Testament (Noah, Abraham, Moses, David) still find themselves entangled in sin.

Mankind after the Fall: Dead in his sins

- Before the Fall, rejecting sin was easy
 - Adam's and Eve's intellect, will and freedom were all aligned with God's will
 - They were perfectly free NOT to sin
 - This is why the first sin was so grievous
- After the Fall, mankind is increasingly inclined toward sin, what we have called concupiscence.
 - Our intellect is darkened, our will is weakened and our freedom is easily abused

From hopelessness to hope...

- Hope of sharing in the divine life – God’s original plan – was gone
 - Nothing sinful can abide with God
 - The result of sin was (and is) separation from God and loss of the divine life
 - “For the wages of sin is death...” (Rom 6:23), not only physical but eternal
- Only God could put things right, and he began to do so, immediately after the Fall, promising Adam and Eve that he would restore mankind to its original holiness
- The rest of the story is what we call the “History of Salvation.”

Two important concepts from the Old Testament...

- Covenant
- Sacrifice
- Both are ways in which God began to repair the relationship with humanity
- Both are important to understand as we look ahead to the Coming of the Messiah

Covenant

- By analogy, like a contract
- Characteristics of a contract
 - An exchange of goods and services
 - Payment
 - A defined time period
 - The relationship ends once the terms are fulfilled
- God, on his own initiative, offered to establish not a contract, but a covenant, which is quite different...

Covenant

- Characteristics of a biblical covenant
 - No payment
 - Not an exchange of goods and services, rather an exchange of persons
 - It is the establishment of a relationship
 - No defined time period – the covenant lasts forever
 - Although it can be broken (by man)
 - Initiated only by God
 - A sign of God's graciousness and his continued desire to share his life with humanity, even after sin.

Examples of OT Covenants

- Noah (Gen 9)
- Abraham (Gen 15)
- Israelites (Ex 24)
- David (2 Sam 7)

- The basic language of the covenants was:
“I will be your God, and you will be my people.”
 - Establishment of a relationship
 - Exchange of persons

Ratification of the Covenants

- Typically, a covenant was ratified with the blood of a sacrificed animal
- Example
 - Ex 24:5-8 (the Sinai Covenant) “Then, having sent young men of the Israelites to offer burnt offerings and sacrifice young bulls as communion offerings to the LORD, Moses took half of the blood and put it in large bowls; the other half he splashed on the altar. Taking the book of the covenant (10 commandments and other laws), he read it aloud to the people, who answered, ‘All that the LORD has said, we will hear and do.’ Then he took the blood and splashed it on the people, saying, ‘This is the blood of the covenant which the LORD has made with you according to all these words.’”

Unfortunately...

- The Israelites, individually and as a people, broke the covenant
- What follows is 700 years of sinning in a continuing cycle:
 - The people forget about God and begin to worship other gods, or grossly violate the Commandments, or disobey the voice of the Prophets speaking on God's behalf
 - Things go badly
 - They repent and return to the Lord
 - God, in his graciousness and mercy, reestablishes the covenant
 - The people rejoice and praise God
 - And then begin sinning again...

Sacrifice

- In the Old Testament, you will see frequent mention of ritual animal sacrifice
 - Sounds gross to us, but in the world at the time, it was a normal thing
- Notion of sacrifice in the Bible
 - Not appeasement of an angry God
 - Not a “quid pro quo”
 - Remember, God has no need of anything
 - He does not need a dead animal
 - Not about controlling God
 - God cannot be controlled
 - He remains completely free to act or not act as it pleases Him

Sacrifice

- A symbolic act expressing the interior disposition of the suppliant
- A response of praise and gratitude to God
- For petition
- Confession of Sin

- All sacrifices were instituted by God
 - Reinforces God's sovereignty and ownership of all creation
 - Gift of thanksgiving
 - Removal of the guilt of sin

Sacrifice

- Important!!
 - The efficacy of the sacrifice flows from God's word and action
 - “If you do this, then I will do that...”
 - Not a human decision
 - Confidence that the sacrifice “works” because God said beforehand that he will act in response to it.
- Interior disposition important
- Role of the priest, who offers the sacrifice
- Foreshadowing of the Sacraments
- There were many types of sacrifices, but let's discuss two of them...

The Passover Lamb

- From the Book of Exodus
 - On the night of the 10th and final plague, all the firstborn in the land of Egypt would die
 - The Israelites were instructed to sacrifice a lamb (male, spotless, without defect) and apply its blood to the doorposts and lintels of their dwellings...
 - “I will go through Egypt, striking down every firstborn in the land, man and beast alike, and executing judgment on all the gods of Egypt – I, the LORD! But for you, the blood will mark the houses where you are. Seeing the blood, I will pass over you; thereby, when I strike the land of Egypt, no destructive blow will come upon you.”
 - Remember, God did not need to see the blood to know where the Israelites were, of course.
 - Thus, the blood of an innocent lamb saved God’s people

The Day of Atonement

- An expiatory (to atone for guilt) sacrifice made once per year for the forgiveness of the sins of the people
- The Scapegoat
 - The high priest laid hands on it confessing the sins of the people
 - In a sense, the sins of the people were ‘transferred’ to the animal
 - It was led into the wilderness to die, thus taking away the sins of the people
 - The “lamb of the People”

The Coming of the Messiah

- Throughout the centuries of the Old Covenant, God promised through his prophets that he would institute a new, definitive and eternal covenant
- “Days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel...it will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors the day I took them by the hand and led them out of the land of Egypt. They broke my covenant.
- But this is the covenant I will make...I will be their God, and they shall be my people (and) I will forgive their iniquity and no longer remember their sin.”
(Jer 31)

The Coming of the Messiah

- The new covenant would be ratified in the blood of a sacrificial victim
 - “This is the chalice of my Blood, the Blood of the new and eternal covenant. It will be poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins...”
- Through his sacrifice, the Victim would bring about the forgiveness of sins
 - Not the “Lamb of the People” but the “Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”

The Coming of the Messiah

- Only God could be the sacrifice, because only God was pure and holy and sinless (without spot or blemish)
- Only Man could offer the sacrifice, because Man was the one who broke the relationship with God through sin.
- The “God-Man” Jesus Christ – the Second Person of the Eternal Trinity takes flesh and unites himself totally to Man
 - As God, Jesus offers humanity a new covenant through his sacrificial death
 - As Man, Jesus accepts and ratifies that covenant for eternity on behalf of all mankind

Sneak peak...

- The Mass is nothing less than...
 - The “making present” here and now of the one, saving sacrifice of Jesus Christ
 - Re-presentation to the Father of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world
 - A ”reaching back through time” to the moment when our covenant with God was made and ratified in the blood of Christ
 - The reaffirmation of our commitment to our part of the covenant
 - Among other things. More to follow...

Next Week...

- The Incarnation
- The Sacrifice of Jesus Christ
- The Person of Jesus, true God and true Man

- Vespers and Rosary for the Nation tomorrow evening at 7pm
- Bible Study on Wednesday at 7pm: Mark 16

- Sources: Catechism of the Catholic Church, Documents of Vatican II, *Catholic Catechism* by Peter J. Kreeft, NABRE, unamsanctamcatholicam.org

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to
the Holy Spirit

R./ As it was in the beginning, is now, and
ever shall be, world without end. Amen.