

MIDWEEK LAETARE

Text: Leviticus 16:3-22, 29-34; Hebrews 10:1-4; LSB 431

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

*Not all the blood of beasts On Jewish altars slain
Could give the guilty conscience peace Or wash away the stain.*

*But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb, Takes all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler Name And richer blood than they.*

As we just heard in the reading from Leviticus, what has come to be known as the Day of Atonement, was the greatest day of sacrifice for the holy nation of Israel. The annual sacrifices made on that day brought the Hebrews back into an undefiled relationship with their God. The high priest entered the Holy of Holies, into the very presence of God, with innocent blood for this reconciliation.

This was the only day in the entire year that anyone, even the High Priest, could come into the presence of the Most High. This presence was so awesome that first the priest made a cloud from burning incense to protect himself from the presence of the Almighty God.

The priest then sprinkled the blood of a slaughtered bull, on the Ark of the Covenant, that is, on the Mercy Seat or throne of God, cleansing the entire priesthood along with their families. By the laying on of hands, the sins of the people were transferred to two goats; one sacrificed to God. The blood of this goat was sprinkled on the Ark of the Covenant making the Holy Place itself, clean. This was necessary because the sins of the people of Israel defiled even the House of the LORD. Finally, the second goat, or scapegoat, was banished carrying the sins of the people into the wilderness.

Just what is the meaning of the Day of Atonement and why did God command it? The answer is as simple as it is complex. Men have written whole doctoral dissertations on the topic, but the simple answer is this: God commanded this day because His creation was defiled by sin, and the ceremony of this day was, at this time, the only way by which Israel could be reconciled to God. This was the day that Israel was temporarily brought back into full communion with God. Yet, there is even more to this Day of days.

All the blood poured out in sacrifice on this day is extremely important because God required this blood for the cleansing of sin. Moses records for us God's Word in the

seventeenth chapter of Leviticus, *“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul.”* The author of Hebrews also writes in the ninth chapter, *“And according to the law almost all things are purified with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no remission.”*

Innocent animals were required to give up their lives so that the people of Israel could live. They gave up their *“life blood.”* This high ceremony was repeated year after year, and so it had to be, because the blood of animals, however innocent, has no power to sanctify a man, nor a woman, to make either holy, and therefore the results of the sacrifice provided no lasting effect but had to be repeated year after year.

Now fast-forward some 1500 years to the time of CHRIST and we see that JESUS is the *eternal* sacrifice that the blood of animals could only *imitate* as shadows of the good things to come. For the author of Hebrews again tells us, *“For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect.... For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins.”* But the Blood of JESUS is different, for in *“one offering He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever,”* and *“has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.”*

*My faith would lay her hand On that dear head of Thine
While like a penitent I stand And there confess my sin.*

*My soul looks back to see The burden Thou didst bear
When hanging on the cursed tree And knows her guilt was there.*

You see, all the Old Testament blood offerings point to one great event, the one great and final sacrifice, the death of CHRIST on the Cross. When CHRIST was hung on the Cross, He entered into the Holy of Holies. In doing this, He fulfilled God’s law and ever stands before the FATHER for us as our own High Priest and *our* atonement.

So, we can clearly see that, it is the Blood of CHRIST that reconciles us to our God. The perfect Blood of the Lamb of God is the perfect atonement or covering over of our sin; His Cross, His throne and our Mercy Seat. The Blood of CHRIST is *our* very *“Life Blood.”* JESUS’ Body is offered up in our place. This is the very same Body and *“Life Blood”* that CHRIST calls us to His altar to eat and drink. JESUS offers up this heavenly meal as the *“New Covenant,”* and He calls us to take part in this feast regularly with His words, *“This do as often as you drink it...”*

The people of the Old Testament brought their sacrifices because doing so was not only commanded by the law, it was a part of who *they were* as the people of God. In our

time, JESUS CHRIST calls *you* to His great High Feast. We come before the LORD at the altar not solely because it is commanded, but because this act of communing is a part of who *we are* as God's people. As Martin Luther tells us, *"Participation in this Supper is part of the confession by which people testify before God and angels and men that they are Christians."*

While this Holy Sacrament is not required for salvation, it is a *mark* of that very salvation. When we approach the altar as members of the Body of CHRIST we affirm that faith which comes to us by grace. Our attendance at the LORD's Table is an affirmation of what we believe, teach, and confess.

I studied under a distinguished professor who states it all so clearly when he says, *"...by partaking in the LORD's Supper the people of God do not do something extraneous to whom they are. This eating and drinking is, strictly speaking not something Christians "do" at all. It is the means by which Christians are Christians and remain Christians"* (Rev. Dr. William Weinrich). Partaking of the LORD's Supper is as necessary for you as the meals you eat each day, as it strengthens, and sustains your faith.

When we, with faith, receive the Body CHRIST gave up on the Cross, when we, with faith, drink the Blood poured out for our sins, we are assured of the very salvation and eternal life CHRIST died to give us. But when we despise it, that is, when we refuse it when it is offered, or receive it in an unworthy manner, our faith is in serious jeopardy. Instead of confessing our faith with the Church, we set ourselves apart from that very Church. This is the oldest of military tactics; that is, to divide and conquer. Rest assured that Satan knows full well how to separate us from our God. Just ask Adam and Eve, or King Saul, or Judas.

*Believing, we rejoice To see the curse remove;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice And sing His bleeding love.*

This Lamb, who is Christ Jesus, is the true Sacrifice to whom all the Old Testament blood sacrifices point, for they are only *"shadows of the good things to come."* Yes, this Lamb is JESUS, who is not only our scapegoat, He is our Passover Lamb, and like the Passover Lamb, He is without blemish and perfect in every way. And here is the strange thing, we rejoice to see this Lamb sacrificed and the curse of sin removed for all time. This Lamb, forsaken by God so that we never have to be, is the only one able reconcile us to our God. JESUS is *our* Blood Sacrifice who makes remission for our sins as He hangs from His throne, the altar of the Cross.

JESUS' Blood sets you free from the bondage of sins and gives to you eternal life. So it is, that you can declare with the saints in heaven, *"Now salvation, and strength, and the Kingdom of our God, and the power of His CHRIST have come, for the accuser of our*

brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the Blood of the Lamb....”

The Lamb has given His Blood for you and there is no one left to accuse you; no voice left to drown out what the Lamb died and rose again to proclaim: *“I forgive you all your sins.”*

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, AND OF THE ✠ SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, AMEN.

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Rev. Raymond D. Parent II
Our Savior Evangelical Lutheran Church
Crestview, Florida
3/22/23 A✠D