

Midweek Lent Homily
Exodus 29:38-46: "A Lamb for a Sin Offering"
March 18, 2020 | Saude, Jerico, & Redeemer Lutheran Churches

Behold, the Lamb!

In Nomine Iesu

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Exodus 29:38-46

Now this is what you shall offer on the altar: two lambs a year old day by day regularly. One lamb you shall offer in the morning, and the other lamb you shall offer at twilight. And with the first lamb a tenth seah of fine flour mingled with a fourth of a hin of beaten oil, and a fourth of a hin of wine for a drink offering. The other lamb you shall offer at twilight, and shall offer with it a grain offering and its drink offering, as in the morning, for a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD. It shall be a regular burnt offering throughout your generations at the entrance of the tent of meeting before the LORD, where I will meet with you, to speak to you there. There I will meet with the people of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. I will consecrate the tent of meeting and the altar. Aaron also and his sons I will consecrate to serve me as priests. I will dwell among the people of Israel and will be their God. And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them out of the land of Egypt that I might dwell among them. I am the LORD their God. (ESV)

O Lord Jesus Christ, innocent Lamb of God, who carried Your cross and upon it the burden of our sin and sorrow, we humbly ask You, enable us by Your Holy Spirit to comfort ourselves at all times in true faith with Your perfect satisfaction for our sins, to praise and glorify You for Your unspeakable love, and to bear our cross after You with patience and humility, that, having suffered with You, we may also by Your mercy be raised with You to everlasting glory, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, now and forever. Amen.
(The Lutheran Liturgy, p. 110)

In Christ Jesus, who *"loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God"* (Eph. 5:2), dear fellow redeemed:

Besides the annual Passover celebration that God commanded His people to observe, He also instituted the practice of daily sacrifices in the tabernacle. This happened after the Israelites had been led out of slavery in Egypt and set up camp near Mt. Sinai. God gave Moses instructions for building a portable tabernacle where He would be present to bless the people. He also called Moses' brother Aaron to serve as a priest along with his sons.

The first part of Exodus chapter 29 describes the consecration of these priests. It was not just a matter of Moses asking them to repeat certain words after him followed by a handshake. The consecration process was quite elaborate. Aaron and his sons had to be washed with water and clothed in clean vestments. Then a bull was brought, they laid their hands on its head, and it was slaughtered for a sin offering. Next they laid their hands on the head of a ram. It was slaughtered, its blood was thrown against the sides of the altar, and the parts of the ram were placed on the altar for a burnt offering.

Then they laid their hands on the head of another ram, which was also slaughtered. Its blood was put *"on the tip of the right ear of Aaron and on the tips of the right ears of his sons, and on the thumbs of their right hands and on the great toes of their right feet"* (v. 20). This blood covered them from head to toe, so that they were ready to hear the Word of God (ear), handle the holy things of God (hands), and walk on the holy ground before God (toes). The rest of the blood was thrown on the altar and sprinkled on the garments of the priests.

There were even more requirements besides these. But this much shows the prominent place of blood in cleansing sinful men. Aaron and his sons could not come before God by their own personal preparations. They had no resources to make themselves holy. It was the LORD who set them apart for His holy work, and He used animal blood to do it. Why animal blood? He later explained through Moses that *"the life of every creature is its blood: its blood is its life"* (Lev. 17:14). The un-holiness of mankind required the shedding of blood. The life of one could only be redeemed through the death of another.

Once Aaron and his sons had been consecrated for the LORD's work, they were commanded to offer two lambs as sacrifices each day. This is described in today's text. Each lamb was a year old. One was offered in the morning and the other at twilight. Like waking up to the smell of a fresh-cooked breakfast or coming home to a dinner hot out of the oven, these sacrifices were *"a pleasing aroma"* to the LORD.

The word *"pleasing"* in Hebrew can also be translated as *"soothing"* or even *"tranquilizing."* It is the word used to describe Noah's burnt offering after the flood waters had receded and the ark had settled on dry ground. The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma of the sacrifice and said, *"I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease"* (Gen. 8:21-22). The offerings of a lamb in the morning and a lamb in the evening had the same effect. It was a soothing aroma to God. It was evidence that His people were humbly keeping His Word.

We are taught to practice something similar as we return to our Baptism each day by repentance and faith. In teaching about the meaning of Baptism, Martin Luther writes: *"Such baptizing with water means that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts; and that a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever"* (Small Catechism).

One way to remind yourself of this daily return to Baptism is to confess your sins and give thanks for forgiveness as you wash your face or take a shower at the beginning of the day. The same goes for the end of the day as you put on fresh clothes and wash before bed. The hymnwriter Paul Gerhardt wrote about this practice in one of his evening hymns: *"To rest my body hasteth, / Aside its garments casteth, / Types of mortality; / These I put off and ponder / How Christ shall give me yonder / A robe of glorious majesty"* (Evangelical Lutheran Hymnary #569, v. 4).

The LORD is pleased with our daily practice of repenting and clinging to His promises, just as He was pleased with those twice a day sacrifices. As long as the people continued in His Word,

He promised to be present in the tabernacle and to *“dwell among the people of Israel”* and *“be their God.”* He came to share His holiness with them and bless them.

This same merciful God still draws near to bless us. He does not come to only one location like the tabernacle or temple in Old Testament times. He comes to every place where His holy Word is heard or read or even meditated upon in the heart or mind. Through His Word, He applies the cleansing blood of Jesus to our whole person from head to toe—our sinful mind, heart, hands, and feet. Our un-holiness required the shedding of Jesus’ holy blood. Our lives could be redeemed only through the loss of His. He took all our sins on Himself and suffered our death, and in exchange He gives us His holiness and eternal life.

By His presence through the Word, the LORD strengthens our faith to endure through good and bad times. Like the people of Israel journeying through the wilderness, we often feel vulnerable and afraid. We wonder what the future will hold for us, especially in times like these. But God does not abandon His people. He dwells among us, protects us, and comforts us through His powerful Word. He is the LORD our God, *“a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness”* (Exo. 34:6). Thanks be to Him! Amen.

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