



## The Word...

“For if the blood of goats and bulls and the sprinkling of a heifer's ashes can sanctify those who are defiled so that their flesh is cleansed, how much more will the blood of Christ... cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God.  
*(from Heb 9:11-15)*

## Pondering the Word ...

The readings this week are provocative, and align well with our theme of metanoia: turning to God with changed hearts and minds.

It's hard to overstate the impact the letters of Paul and his disciples have on the Jewish community. It is easy to see why Paul is viewed as a heretic. In the Letter to the Hebrews, the author talks about “dead works” (the Hebrew translation is “dead observances”); for example, the type of peace and thanksgiving offerings described in today's reading from Exodus. This is strong language, calling revered 1,500-year-old rites of the patriarchs “dead.”

By Jesus' time, most of the tribal observances we hear about in the Pentateuch—the five books of Moses—have been toned down. While animal sacrifices are still offered by many Jews (think of the two doves sacrificed when Jesus was presented at the Temple, Jesus driving out those who sold animals at that same temple, and the sacrifice of the Passover lamb), dousing the altar and the people with blood has pretty much disappeared, replaced by other symbolic ceremonies.

Nonetheless, no one likes to hear the rituals of their tradition called dead or meaningless, but back then -- and now -- we see rites of faith carried out by rote, not by heart; people who cry out, “Lord, Lord,” but fail in dramatic ways to do God's will (Mt 7:21).

I need to ask myself: “Are my observances dead? Or, do they truly serve to worship the living God by the way I live my faith each day?”

## Living the Word...

In Roman Catholicism, today is the Feast of Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist is central to Catholic practice, but I'm afraid that although it can be a life-changing rite—not “dead” at all — it can still fail to change our hearts if we are not attentive, or worse, if we let it become a checklist item.

Every faith practice has its rites and rituals that can either be life-changing or become rote. Let's not let Jesus' words, “Do this in memory of me,” make us imagine he is not present to us today, calling us to change.

## Personal Reflections and Ideas...

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**Mon, Jun 7:** "...Blessed be...the Father of compassion and the God of all encouragement, who encourages us in our every affliction, so that we may be able to encourage those who are in any affliction..." (2 Cor 1:1-17)

Lots of "encouragement" going on in this passage. For me, that word speaks of perseverance. The actual Greek words are "comfort" and "consolation." To me, those speak of love and mercy. **For reflection:** *Do you try to persevere on your own, by your own will? Or, when you suffer an affliction of mind, body, or spirit, do you turn to God for comfort?* **Today's provision:** *Perseverance is good and noble, but impossible for us without God. Ask for God's comfort and consolation to help you face whatever is challenging you today.*

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**Tues, Jun 8:** "You are the salt of the earth." (Mt 5:13-16)

Let's talk about salt. When we hear the expression "salt of the earth," we take it to mean common people like the fishermen and farmers who followed Jesus. But salt was a very valuable commodity back then, used to preserve food. In fact, Roman soldiers were often paid in salt. (Fun linguistic tidbit: the word "salary" comes from Latin for salt!) Perhaps Jesus means something else here. Perhaps he really means that simplicity is a gift. You are of great value in God's Kingdom! **For reflection:** *Do you ever feel you have nothing offer in God's Kingdom? That you are too simple, or not talented or knowledgeable enough?* **Today's provision:** *Tell Jesus how you feel about this. Let him tell you what gifts, what light he sees in you. Ask him to give you the courage to let your light shine before others.*

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**Wed, Jun 9:** "Now if the ministry of death, carved in letters on stone, was so glorious...how much more will the ministry of the Spirit be glorious?" (2 Cor 3:4-11) "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law..." (Mt 5:17-19)

We talked about this on Sunday. Paul uses "Hebrew hyperbole" here. How would you feel if your practice was referred to as "the ministry of death?!" He's so eager for people to accept Christ that in reality, he alienates a lot of people. Jesus isn't so harsh. He respects the tradition and the law. He tells us he has come to show us how to live what the patriarchs and prophets taught. **For reflection:** *"Faith is not about what is absolute and unchanging, but rather what is uncertain and ever-changing."* (Steven Charleston, from *Ladder to the Light*, p.28) *God is making all things new.* **Today's provision:** *Consider your "orthodoxy" AND your "orthopraxis;" i.e., what you claim to believe and how that belief animates your life. Look for any disconnects that might be life-draining.*

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**Thu, Jun 10:** "Therefore, if you bring your gift to the altar, and there recall that your brother has anything against you, leave your gift there, go first and be reconciled with your brother, and then come and offer your gift." (Mt 5:2-26)

Another example of the theme this week: faith demonstrated through rituals and faith lived through our lives. Jesus tells the Pharisees in Mt 23:23, you are supposed to do both, because without the latter, the former is just for show. **For reflection:** *This is not an "either/or" but "both/and."* *Given the choice, what do you think God prefers? ("I desire mercy, not sacrifice..." Hos 6:6)* **Today's provision:** *If someone has anything against you that is within your power to rectify, reach out. Seek reconciliation, even if it is something you can't change. Then offer thanksgiving to God.*

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**Fri, Jun 11:** "...that you...may have strength to comprehend with all the holy ones what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge." (Eph 3:8-12, 14-19)

This is a strange prayer: "Give me the strength to understand Christ's love which surpasses all knowledge," i.e., "give me the strength to know what I cannot know?" Here's what I think the author of Ephesians means: "Give me the strength of the holy ones—of Abraham, Moses, Mary, Joseph – to accept the depth and breadth of a love I cannot fathom, the kind of love described in today's reading from Hosea." **For reflection:** *Read the passage from Hosea and let God's words and love sink deep into your heart.* **Today's provision:** *Do you know someone who struggles with the concept of God's love? As much as you can, model that love for them today.*

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**Sat, Jun 12:** "So whoever is in Christ is a new creation: the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come." (2 Cor 5:14-21)

A great bookend for this week and for this time of crisis we've been living through. While we mourn greatly those who have passed away, still, with hope, we look ahead to something new. **For reflection/today's provision:** *Consider praying this "Emerging from COVID" examen: <https://jesuitseastois.org/news-feed/emerging-from-covid-an-examen> to help you reflect on the newness you are or are hoping to experience.*