

The Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
November 15, 2015
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“ . . . a single sacrifice . . . ”

Jesus learned about sacrifice the way many of us have learned, are learning about sacrifice – from our parents and from our faith community. We know Mary and Joseph were devout Jews. They wanted their son to fully understand the traditions of their faith. They took him to be named and circumcised on the eighth day after his birth. We celebrate the Feast of the Holy Name every January 1st.

When he was 40-days old they presented him in the Temple. I'm sure Jesus heard this story many times as he grew up and visited the Temple in Jerusalem. How his father could only afford two small birds for the ritual sacrifice. How Anna and Simeon spoke with joy and excitement.

We hear about Jesus in the Temple again as a 12-year old, left behind by his parents as they start back to Nazareth. When Mary and Joseph find Jesus he is teaching the elders and scribes. “*Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?*” (Luke 2:49) he tells his parents.

Of course, near the end of the story, during Jesus' last week in Jerusalem, the synoptic Gospels tell us Jesus is again in the Temple, overturning the moneychangers' tables and driving out those who bought and sold animals for the sacrifice. This act of righteous indignation causes the religious authorities to arrest Jesus and have him executed.

In today's Gospel, Jesus and his disciples are outside the Temple during this last week, just a day or two from his arrest. The disciples are still impressed by the great Temple, built centuries before by Solomon and completely expanded and made spectacular by Herod during his reign. “*Look... what large stones and what large buildings...*” (Mark 13:1)

Jesus tells them that this will all be destroyed. Later many false witnesses testify against him by saying that Jesus said he would destroy the Temple and “*build it in three days...*” (Matthew 26:61). History records that the Temple was destroyed by the Romans about the year 70 AD to punish the Jews after their rebellion. But no one understands that Jesus is talking about his own death and resurrection. The “*single sacrifice*” he will make on the cross, once and for all.

Later the disciples do understand and the community of faith, the Church, celebrates this single sacrifice at every celebration of the Holy Eucharist and in every act of outreach and mission, pro-claiming Jesus' sacrifice of love is more powerful than evil, sin and death.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews affirms this in the reading for today. “*Christ... offered for all time a single sacrifice...*” Yet the struggle continues, the conflict between the sacrifice of love and the threat of evil and death. How tragic, as we saw again with the Paris bombings and killings last Friday, that so many innocent lives are sacrificed because of hatred and terror.

The early Church faced this same hatred and terror and the letter to the Hebrews was written, in part, to Jewish Christians facing persecutions. So we, too, should be encouraged by this passage. And we should help to encourage others, especially those faced with suffering and great sacrifice.

We can share the lessons from the Letter to the Hebrews:

1. Have confidence. “*Hold fast,*” even in times of darkness, challenging our faith, challenging our love.
2. Live in “*hope without wavering*” because. . .
3. You are part of a community. We are “*to provoke one another to love and good deeds. . .*”
4. As we “*meet together,*” as we worship and work connected to the “*single sacrifice*” through our sacrifices (including our pledges, our time, and our talent which we celebrate today).
5. Finally, don’t waste a moment – there is an urgency to our faith and the call to follow Jesus.

The “*Day*” approaches, as we’ll celebrate in two weeks when we begin the new Church year on Advent Sunday. Watch, be ready, be prepared. For we never know when the ultimate sacrifice will be demanded.

Daniel 12:1-3
Psalm 16:3-11
Hebrews 10:11-14, 19-25
Mark 13:1-8