

The Thirty-second Sunday of Ordinary Time

(Year B)

<i>First Reading</i>	1 Kings 17:10-16
<i>Response</i>	Praise the Lord, O my soul!
<i>Psalm</i>	Psalm 146:7, 8-9, 9-10
<i>Second Reading</i>	Hebrews 9:24-28
<i>Gospel Acclamation</i>	Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
<i>Gospel</i>	Mark 12:38-44

The thirty-second Sunday in Ordinary Time for year B continues our journey through the letter to the Hebrews, and it brings us to one of the...I would say one of the most crucial chapters in the book, and that's Hebrews 9. And it only gives us a few verses from chapter 9, but as usual, these verses are packed with meaning for their original audience, but they're also packed with theological implications for us today — in particular, for our theology of the Holy Eucharist, of the sacrifice of the Mass.

So let's take a look at Hebrews 9:24-28. Let's see what it says:

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.¹

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.

Very powerful text. As I've mentioned in other videos, one of the key concepts that's necessary to understand the letter to the Hebrews — the logic of the letter to the Hebrews — is the ancient Jewish belief that there were two temples...the earthly temple that was visible and centered in Jerusalem and built by Solomon and destroyed but then later rebuilt, and the heavenly temple, the heavenly sanctuary that is in the realm where God dwells... the invisible, ineffable, supernatural heavenly temple.

Once you understand that distinction between the earthly temple and the heavenly temple, you can understand what's going on in the letter to the Hebrews here. So for example, if you look back at verse 24, it says:

For Christ has entered, not into a sanctuary made with hands, a copy of the true one, but into heaven itself...

Now pause there. So notice, what's Hebrews doing? It's drawing a distinction between the sanctuary made with hands — that's the earthly temple — and what he calls the true temple, which is the one that is in Heaven. And notice here, it says — and this is important — that the earthly temple of Jerusalem is actually a copy of the heavenly one. The Greek word there is *antitypos*, or sometimes you'll actually see in Archaic theological writing the terminology of an antitype.

Now it doesn't mean something that's against the other one. It means a reflection or a copy of it. So in ancient Jewish... what we might call sacramental theology or liturgical theology, the earthly temple or the earthly tabernacle, wasn't constructed according to the arbitrary whims of the local architect hired by Moses to build the sanctuary or something like that. No, no, no, no, no. It's not an arbitrary architectural design. It's actually a copy of the heavenly architecture of the heavenly sanctuary.

This is not just an idea that's present everywhere in Second Temple period. So for example, if you read the Dead Sea Scrolls, there's a document among the Dead Sea Scrolls scholars named 11QTemple, sometimes called the Temple Scroll. And it will elaborate on this Jewish idea that the earthly temple is a copy of the heavenly

temple. You'll find it elsewhere in other writings from the time of Jesus and the time of St. Paul.

But this is a biblical idea. If you go all the way back, turn back to Exodus 25, this is the foundational account of when the Israelites got to Mount Sinai. They received the law of Moses (the Ten Commandments), they made the blood covenant with God through sacrifice in Exodus 24. And then once that is done, once the covenant is made, the first thing God does in Exodus 25 — and frankly, what He does for the rest of the book of Exodus, 25-40 — is tell them how He wants His sanctuary to be designed, how He wants His place of worship to be built, what He wants them to put in it, and how they are to offer sacrifice. In other words, the bulk of the book of Exodus (of the second half of Exodus) is about liturgy; it's about worship. It's about the tabernacle. It's about sacrifices. It's about the priesthood.

And at the very beginning of that description of how to build the tabernacle, God says this to Moses:

And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. (Exodus 25:8)

It's the tabernacle, and He says:

And see that you make them...

Meaning, make it and everything that goes in the tabernacle:

... after the pattern for them, which is being shown you on the mountain. (Exodus 25:40)

In verse 9, He says:

According to all that I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it.

And the Greek word here for pattern in verse 9 and verse 40 is *typos*, the same word used by Hebrews. So you're going to make the earthly tabernacle and everything that goes in it, according to the *typos*, according to the type that I show you on the mountain.

So what Exodus here is saying is that God is going to bring Moses up to the top of the mountain. He's going to bring him to the top of the mountain and give him a vision of the heavenly sanctuary. Moses alone is going to get to see what the sanctuary in Heaven looks like, so to speak. And then when he comes down the mountain, he is supposed to construct the tabernacle on Earth according to its pattern or type that's revealed to him through the vision that he has on the top of the mountain of Heaven.

So the idea here is that the earthly temple is a kind of visible outward sign of the invisible heavenly reality of the sanctuary of God. We have a term for that — an outward sign of an invisible supernatural reality. Yeah, it's a sacrament. So there's a very sacramental understanding of the temple in Jerusalem that we frankly, us modern Christians, we just tend to miss completely... that in a sense, for a first century Jew, when they went up to Jerusalem for the sacrifice of the Passover, and when they saw the sanctuary, they believed that they were getting a glimpse of Heaven on Earth. That to participate in the liturgy of the temple was to share in the heavenly liturgy of the angels in a visible, partial, temporary, earthly way...going all the way back to Moses at the time of the Exodus.

Okay, so with that in mind, then... let's go back to Hebrews chapter 9. With that basic Jewish theology in place, what Hebrews is saying in chapter 9 is that when Christ died, rose again, and then ascended into Heaven, the ascension into Heaven wasn't just ... it wasn't just a vindication of Jesus. It certainly wasn't just a departure of Jesus — you know, Him saying to the apostles, "I'll see you later guys. I'll see you at the end of time. I'll be back." That's not the importance of the ascension for the author of the Hebrews.

For the author of the Hebrews, the ascension is a liturgical event, because just as the high priest would go up the steps into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, he would ascend into the Holy of Holies, which was the most elevated

— not just the most interior, but the most elevated — part of the sanctuary, so too Jesus (the new high priest, according to the new covenant of Melchizedek) ascends into the heavenly sanctuary. It's not made with hands. It's not of this world, in order:

... to appear in the presence of God on our behalf.

He's going there as a high priest to intercede for us, just as Aaron would intercede for the Israelites on the Day of Atonement.

So for the author of the Hebrews, the ascension is the fulfillment of the Jewish Day of Atonement. So just as Jesus fulfills the Passover sacrifice on Earth — at the time of the Passover through His words and actions at the Last Supper and then His death on the cross — He also fulfills the Jewish Day of Atonement, not on Earth but in Heaven.

I have a course called *The Bible and the Mass: The Jewish Roots of Christian Liturgy*. And in that lecture series, you can get it on CD or you can do downloads now, nobody listens to CDs anymore — well, nobody young. In that series, I show how Jesus fulfills the spring festivals of the Jewish liturgical calendar, like Passover and Pentecost. He fulfills those on Earth and in time when they were being celebrated by the Jews, but He fulfills the fall festivals, like the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles ... He fulfills those in Heaven and eternity. So there's a fascinating distinction between the fulfillment of the fall feasts and the fulfillment of the spring feasts in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' passion, death, resurrection, and ascension. So you might take a look at that if you want to go into a little more depth.

For our purposes here, I just want to emphasize that according to the letter to the Hebrews, the ascension of Jesus is a fulfillment of the Day of Atonement, the annual day of atonement. And you can see this because he says:

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own...

So what's that annual sacrifice? That is the Day of Atonement. It only happened yearly. It happened once a year. The high priest would go in, he'd offer a sacrifice to atone for the sins of the people from that year, but Jesus, if that were how He was doing it, Hebrews says:

...he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.

He would have to be sacrificed over and over and over again every single year if He were going to continue to atone for sin. But, Hebrews says:

But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:26)

This is really, really crucial. So if you look at this text — forgive me, I'm going to have to do a little bit more Greek here. But in this case, when Hebrews says “once for all at the end of the age”, it's not the exact same word that I used earlier.

Whenever we were looking at Hebrews chapter 7, and it said that Christ died “once and for all” — *epophax*, once and for all — here the expression is slightly different but it's actually very revealing. So here, the expression is *hapax synteleia tōn aiōnon*.

Now what does that mean? The word *hapax* just means “once”. It's a variant of that other expression, but I have to do this, because every graduate student in New Testament has to learn this expression. It's called a *hapax legomenon*. A *hapax legomenon* is a word, a Greek word, that only occurs one time in the New Testament. So it'll be a unique word.

So in this case, Hebrews is describing the death of Jesus and the appearance of Him here. He's saying that He's appeared once (*hapax*) and for all at the end of the age. And the expression here in Greek is the consummation of the ages. It means end of the old creation — the end of the old creation and the beginning of the new creation. So it's an eschatological term.

And so what he's describing here is that Christ, unlike the priests of the old covenant who belonged to the old creation who would die, they'd have to sacrifice

over and over and over again, Christ is offering the sacrifice that is going to be once, but it's going to endure until the end of the ages. It's going to endure forever. And what's the sacrifice He's offering? Not the blood of bull, but the sacrifice of Himself.

Now... the reason that this is important is because where and when is He offering that sacrifice? We know that He offers it on Calvary. We know that He offers it on Calvary, and that seems to be the principle meaning of the context when Hebrews talks in chapter 7 about Jesus offering Himself:

... once for all when he offered up himself.

But in *this* context, when is Jesus making this offering of Himself? It's not just on Calvary, because remember, the whole context here is of Jesus as the new high priest of the new Day of Atonement. So when is He offering Himself? It's when He enters into the heavenly sanctuary to appear before God on our behalf, just like the high priests did in the Day of Atonement. But now He's going to offer the sacrifice of Himself once and for the consummation of the ages, once and for all time. He's going to offer an eternal sacrifice.

And if you have any doubts about His ability to do that, remember ... go back to the Gospels. When Jesus rises from the dead — you either read this in Luke or John — He still bears the wounds. He bears the marks of the cross, and He's going to make the offering of the sacrifice of Himself for all time. It's an eternal offering of Himself to God in charity. And it's that charity, that sacrifice, that atones for sin not just every year (like the Day of Atonement did on Earth) but for all time, for all eternity.

Now ... I'll come back to that in just a minute, because it's going to be really important for understanding the theology, not just of the priesthood we talked about, but also the theology of the Mass as a sacrifice. So just hold on one second.

But before I say that, make those points about the Mass, notice here that as soon as he (the author of Hebrews) makes that point, he now pivots to the second coming of Christ. And he draws an analogy here in closing. He says:

And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

What's he getting at here? Well, here the author to the Hebrews (or the author of Hebrews) is presupposing the Jewish concept of what we would call the particular judgment. In other words, that when a person dies, that is the end of their struggle with sin, and that's when they're going to receive their particular judgment — whether they will be punished or whether they will be blessed, whether they'll go to Hades or whether they'll go to Abraham's bosom, for example, like in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. And he's saying, just as the judgment comes at the end of a man's life in the particular way, so too Christ:

...having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time...

But He's not coming back in the *parousia*, in the second coming, to deal with sin again. He's not going to come back to be crucified again in order to wipe away sin. Instead, He's going to come back to save those who are waiting for Him.

So this is very important. It might not be an issue for us, but remember, for the first readers of Hebrews, they're trying to wrap their brains around how it is Christ's sacrifice — which happens once in time — can continue to be efficacious. Because what they're used to are the annual sacrifices of the Day of Atonement, of the high priest, where a bull has to be killed every year in order to atone for the annual sins. And what the author of Hebrews is trying to show is Christ's sacrifice is *essentially* different than the old covenant sacrifices of Yom Kippur, because if it were like them, He would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world.

In other words, He would have to be killed over and over and over and over again. Or, He might have to die again when He comes back at the *parousia*. But Hebrews is saying no, no, no — that's not how the sacrifice of Christ works, because He didn't enter into a sanctuary in time, He entered into the heavenly sanctuary of

eternity. And it's from there that He will return, not to put away sin once again, but to bring those who are waiting for Him *with* Him in the *parousia*, in His second coming into glory.

Alright, so there's a lot we could say about that. I just bring that up, because I wanted to at least highlight that verse about the particular judgment, because this is one of the few verses in the New Testament that's really clear about this, and this is where we get the Catholic doctrine — the Catholic teachings in the *Catechism* and elsewhere — that our judgment is going to come at the moment of our death. There's no second chance after death. We get one chance — this life, and with death, comes the judgement. And then, of course, there will be the general judgment at the end of time at the *parousia*, but that's a distinctive end.

Let's go back to the question about the Mass. This passage was another point of controversy in the 16th century with the Protestant reformers, especially with Martin Luther. A lot of times Catholics today, when they talk about the Protestant Reformation or they talk about the debates of the Reformation, will frequently focus on the debate over the Real Presence — over transubstantiation, for example.

There were different theories of the Real Presence at the time of the Reformation. Was He just spiritually present in the bread and wine, for example, Calvin might have argued? Or was there consubstantiation, like Luther argued, where bread and wine exist alongside the Body and Blood of Christ? That's wrong. And then, is it transubstantiation, like the Council of Trent taught? Which teaches that there's no more bread and wine, there's no more substance to the bread and wine after the consecration — all that remains is the appearance, but that all that is present on the altar is Jesus Christ, Body, Blood, Soul, and Divinity.

So a lot of times our debates today kind of rage around that or focus on that. But in the time of the Reformation, if you read the reformers themselves, you'll notice that one of the things they were actually most opposed to was not the idea of Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. That is a major issue, but it was the issue of whether or not the Mass should be described as a sacrifice. Is the Mass a sacrifice?

If you read Martin Luther on this, he uses some of his most violent rhetoric to oppose and critique the idea of the Mass as a sacrifice. So listen to this quote; this is from Martin Luther. He wrote a tractate called *The Abomination of the Secret Mass*. He was always very bombastic in his titles and his language. Listen to how he describes the Catholic belief that the Mass is a sacrifice. He says this:

Martin Luther (16th Century): The priest offers up once again Jesus Christ, who offered himself only once (Heb 9:25-26)...

And he quotes here Hebrews 9:25-26. That's our passage for today.

... just as he died only once and cannot die again or be offered up again (Rom 6:9-10)... *Yet they [Catholic priests] go ahead and every day offer him up more than a hundred thousand times throughout the world. They thereby deny, both with their deeds and in their hearts, that Christ has washed sin away and has died and risen again. This is such an abomination...*

Meaning the idea that the Mass is a sacrifice.

*This is such an abomination that I don't believe it could be sufficiently punished on earth if it rained pure fire from heaven. The blasphemy is so great that it must simply wait for eternal hell fire.*²

That's from Martin Luther, on *The Abomination of the Secret Mass*. So what Luther is saying here is that the idea that the Mass is a sacrifice is so blasphemous that even if it rained down fire from Heaven upon all the Catholic priests on every altar in the world, it wouldn't be a sufficient punishment for the blasphemy. It's just going to have to wait for them all to be eternally damned.

Yeah. Tell me how you really feel, Marty. This is really strong rhetoric. Why is he so opposed to the idea of the Mass as a sacrifice? Well, it's in the way he interprets the reading for today, Hebrews 9:25-26.

² Martin Luther, *The Abomination of the Secret Mass*, in Pelikan, *Luther's Works*, vol. 36, p. 320

See, Luther thinks that when we refer to Mass as a sacrifice, we're saying that the sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary wasn't enough, that it wasn't sufficient. That it wasn't enough to deal with human sin, so we have to kill Jesus, we have to sacrifice Him over and over and over again, every time the Mass is offered in order to take away sins.

So for him, it's a denial of the efficacy of Calvary to say that the Mass is a sacrifice. In the wake of Luther's rejection of the Mass as a sacrifice, the Council of Trent responded with its decree on the Mass and on the Eucharist. And in particular, it has a section called the *Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass*. And listen to how Trent responded to Luther's claim. It said this, this is 16th century Council of Trent:

In the divine sacrifice that is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner [cf. Heb 9:14, 27f.] on the altar of the Cross is contained and is offered in an unbloody manner.³

And then again, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* builds on Trent in 1992 and develops it a little bit further and says this:

The sacrifice of Christ and the sacrifice of the Eucharist are *one single sacrifice*: "The victim is one and the same: the same now offers through the ministry of priests, who then offered himself on the cross; only the manner of offering is different." "And since in this divine sacrifice which is celebrated in the Mass, the same Christ who offered himself once in a bloody manner on the altar of the cross is contained and offered in an unbloody manner ... this sacrifice is truly propitiatory."⁴

That's *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, paragraph 1367, citing the Council of Trent. The error of Luther's argument, that to call the Mass a sacrifice as

³ Council of Trent, *Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass*, Ch. 2 (1562 A.D.)

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, par 1367, citing the Council of Trent, *Doctrine and Canons on the Sacrifice of the Mass*, Ch. 2 (1562 A.D.), and Heb 9:14, 27

blasphemy, is that he assumes that the Mass and Calvary are two different sacrifices. That there was this one sacrifice on Calvary and that the Mass is another sacrifice that somehow has to add to the sacrifice at Calvary.

But what Trent and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* respond to that error by saying is, no, you misunderstand it. There's only one sacrifice, and that's the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. But, that one sacrifice of Christ on Calvary is made present in a different mode in the unbloody sacrifice of the Mass. So Calvary is a bloody sacrifice, and the Mass is an unbloody sacrifice. But the sacrifice of the Eucharist and the sacrifice of the cross are one single sacrifice.

Now you might think ... maybe you're thinking, "Well, okay, that sounds good, but why? Why are they one single sacrifice? How can you know?" By reading Hebrews 9 in context, because the context of Hebrews 9:26, that Jesus:

... has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

And the context of Hebrews chapter 7 where it says that He offers Himself "once for all" in Hebrews 7:27. The context is His identity as a Melchizedekian high priest who goes into the heavenly sanctuary to offer Himself in the temple not made with hands, in eternity, once and for all time.

In other words, the reason Luther couldn't see how the Mass could be a sacrifice is because he focused on Calvary and forgot about the ascension. He — this is so important. If you try to understand the Paschal Mystery, and you think it just has to do with Jesus' death, and you forget about his resurrection and ascension, you're going to miss the boat. Because what the ascension does — the mystery of the ascension does — is it reveals how Jesus takes the earthly sacrifice of Calvary into eternity. And once you understand that He takes that earthly sacrifice into eternity, you can understand how now, from Heaven, He can be made present — His Body, Blood, His soul, and His divinity — on every altar throughout the world every day until the end of the ages, until the end of time.

And unfortunately, to this day, people forget about the ascension. We focus a lot on the death of Good Friday. We focus a lot even on the resurrection on Easter Sunday. But we can forget that one of the central mysteries of the Christian faith is the mystery of the ascension. Because as Hebrews 9 reveals to us, in that mystery of the ascension, Jesus fulfills the Jewish feast of Yom Kippur. And Jesus inaugurates the new Day of Atonement that takes place not in time but in eternity, by offering Himself to the Father on behalf of humanity once and for all time.

And it's that heavenly eternal self-offering that's going to be made present every time the sacrifice of the Mass is offered on every altar throughout the world until the end of the ages.