

October 21, 2018 - 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

A little silver haired lady calls her neighbor and says, please come over and help me. I have a killer jigsaw puzzle and I can't figure out how supposed to go. Her neighbor says, "What it's supposed to be?" She said, "According to the picture on the box, it's this nice pretty rooster. Her neighbor decides to come over and help with the puzzle. She lets him in and shows him where she has the puzzle spread all over the dining room table. He studies the pieces for a minute and then looks at her; looks at the box and says, "First of all, no matter what we do we are not going to be able to assemble these pieces into anything resembling a rooster. Second he says, as he takes her hand, let's have a cup of tea." Then he said with a deep sigh, We can put the cornflakes back in the box."

Today all three readings are about substitutionary sacrifice. And all of you are going, "What? I've never heard that as a Catholic before." If you remember the movie Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, back in the 1960s, the word substitutionary was used, probably the only time it was used that I can remember. He said substitutionary locomotion and that's how the car flew through the air. Today we're talking about substitutionary sacrifice. Now people in the Old Testament and in early New Testament, they would have understood something based upon the culture of their life. They would have understood that the sacrifice they did the temple where they took the animal to be sacrificed was a substitutionary sacrifice. The animal was being substituted for them. Animals were being sacrificed most of the time for sin, for a broken relationship with God. They understood that that meant death, when you sinned against God. So, this animal is being killed in place of them. They deserved death for sinning against God so the animal was being substituted for themselves. All the people did this, especially on the day of atonement when you would take the goat and you would put your hands on the goat and transfer your wrongdoing. They didn't have so much of an idea of individualism that we do today. They would transfer their sins onto the goat and then send it away to go die in the desert. That's where we get scapegoat from. Every animal that was sacrificed, was sacrificed to bring us back into right relationship with God. The animals being substituted for us. In all three readings these people would have understood the underlying theme that we miss because we don't have a culture of sacrifice. We have more of an individual notion of sin and we have the sacrifice of confession.

Our first reading is from the book of the prophet Isaiah. This is one of the four suffering servant psalms found in the book of Isaiah. These psalms are word for word prophecies of what was going to happen to Jesus; His ministry, His passion, His death. We have one of those today and the people would have understood this better than we do. He gives his life as an offering for sin so his descendants will have a long life. This person that they're talking about, the people would have understood it as, this person is going to put himself in place of me and sacrifice himself so that I don't have to die. And because he's going to do that, we'll have a long life. Now they understood it to be life on this planet but it's really eternal life. They were seeing somebody substituting himself for themselves, so they did not get punished for their sin. They would've said, "Wow! This is amazing because right now we're just doing this with animals." This is why they yearned with so much longing, for the coming of the Messiah, the Savior who was going to do that. Substitute His life for theirs so they would have a right relationship with God.

In our second reading from Hebrews, most of Scripture scholars believe that Hebrews was written by a temple priest, because the language is so priestly from the temple and it's written in a time when the people's knowledge would still be fresh about what happened in the temple. He talks about a great high

priest passing through the heavens and a throne of grace to receive mercy. The temple was built in courts, different areas. The court of the Gentiles was first and as you walked your way back you came to a place where the priests were doing things. But there was only one person who could go all the way to the back of the temple. He would come to a veil, a curtain, a big curtain that was separating this part of the temple from this room behind it. In the room behind it was the Ark of the Covenant, with the 10 Commandments or with the Tabernacle, depending on the time in history. The veil, the curtain represented heaven. The high priest passed through heaven to be present before the throne of God, to beg mercy, to offer sacrifice, to get the mercy of God for the people. All of this was for the nation, for the people. But now we see it in another light and this what the letter of the Hebrews is talking about; there is only one high priest, Jesus Christ. He passed through heaven to get to the throne of God, where He can beg mercy from God, for all of us. The one who gave His life so that we would be free from sin and have eternal life, according to the first reading. So we see Jesus becoming a substitutionary sacrifice, substituting himself for us so that we do not receive the damnation that we deserve for our sins. So that most of them are taken away, and once in a while we have to go to confession, but the door of heaven is there and it's open because of the sacrifice Jesus made on each one of our behalf's. Jesus says in the gospel today in Mark, (he's got little kids arguing about who's the greatest). Finally James and John, the big two who were always with Jesus come up and they say, "Jesus! Grant that in your glory we sit one at your right and the other your left. We want to be your two commanding generals in the army. We want to be the ones who rule Israel with You." It's a misunderstanding of the prophecy. And Jesus of course says, "Okay you can do it." But they were talking power and he was talking death, because to drink from the cup meant two things; either die with me or rule with me. So they are talking ruling and Jesus is talking dying. We see that James becomes the first apostle martyred. John gives his life in another way, he had to live to be 105 and watch everybody else die, which is not a good thing. At the very end Jesus talks about being a servant, about service, about the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve. In the last paragraph, "Give His life as a ransom for many." The word in Latin means to buy back, to purchase. Jesus purchased our lives, Jesus purchased our souls by His service on the cross. Jesus substituted Himself so that each one of us does not have to do that, so we don't have to suffer and die, so that we can get to heaven. Jesus did that, and more. He sacrificed his life so we can live. He ransomed us so that we can be free. He purchased us back from sin and from going to hell. He was punished so that we wouldn't be punished the way we deserve. Every Sunday, every daily Mass, every time we have Mass we re-create the sacrifice, this service that Jesus did. It's not bloody, we can't see it, but it re-presents Calvary, the sacrifice on Calvary because when you have an eternal being, God, what happens to Him happens outside of time, so it's eternal. Every time we have the Eucharist it's Jesus, once again substituting Himself so that we do not have to suffer the penalty for our sins, so that we have been ransomed, bought again, so we belong to God again. Jesus did this and the cross is the instrument of service, the ultimate instrument. But you know, we Catholics are really big on guilt, we hear *Catholic guilt*. That's because we like to beat ourselves up with hammers instead of putting them in the toolbox. We take the hammer that put the nails in Christ and we beat ourselves up with it. "Bless me father for I have sinned." "Father, I can't forgive myself for this sin I confessed already." And I want to say, "Well who the heck do you think you are? Jesus already took care of that, Jesus already forgave you, God's forgiven you, how come you can't forgive yourself if God has forgiven you?" It's arrogance, it's pride if we can't forgive ourselves. And it means we don't understand what truly happened on the cross, it was the ultimate act of service, of sacrifice. Jesus substituted Himself so we can be forgiven. How dare we say, "Jesus I don't accept your sacrifice." We can't do that because that's the ultimate act of service.

He substituted himself so you and I can now talk about going to heaven. Prior to that we didn't have to. He sacrificed himself so that I don't have to sacrifice pigeons, goats, lambs, cows, right here on this alter, it would be messy. He sacrificed Himself so that we would be free from all this, it was holding down the old nation of Israel.

Jesus gives us another example in the gospel of Matthew about just exactly what this this means, what he did up there on the cross. He says in Matthew 23 verse 37, "Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to them. How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you are not willing." Well, we think that's fine, when the chicks are in danger they run under mom's wings. But in that time when Jesus was living they would've known something else, they would've seen something else. When the chicken coop caught on fire the chicks would run under the hens' wings and she would protect them. The fire would burn her and kill her but her chicks would live. The sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, He put us under His arms so that we would be saved from the fires of hell, he saved us from our sins which take us to hell. He put us under His arms, we exist today under the arms of Jesus on the cross. We are saved, we are free, we are forgiven. We hear our Protestant brothers say, "Are you saved? Is Jesus your personal Lord and Savior?" We should say yes to the last one, "Yes, He is my personal Lord and Savior and, I'm still in the process of being saved because I'm still alive." We should think about this because it would free us up from so much of the Catholic guilt, from so much of the stuff where people in the Catholic Church say there's too many rules and regulations. Why are they there? So that we stay under the arms of Jesus on the cross. So that we emulate him, we imitate him. What did Jesus say? "All I want you to do is serve each other, love your neighbor as yourself." To sacrifice you have to serve, to serve you have to sacrifice. We have to sacrifice our time, sometimes our money, sometimes "I would rather be doing this than helping you," but that's service, it's a sacrifice. It's an imitation of the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. To serve is to sacrifice yourself.

Asia's first Nobel Prize winner in literature in 1913, his last name was Tagore, and this is what he wrote: *I slept and dreamt that life was joy, then I awoke and realized that life was service, and then I went to work and lo and behold I discovered that service is joy.*

We were created to be like Christ, we're followers of Christ, to serve is an imitation of Him and also to sacrifice is imitation of Him.

God bless you.