

Give Me A Sign

Sign and Sacrifice

Disposable relationships are common among people these days. This isn't always bad, but it becomes bad if it is all we ever know. It is especially negative when we do it with God. We often prefer to have a "contractual" relationship with God, but God only enters into covenants. We might want God to "do something for us if we do something for Him", but God only enters into covenants. Covenants are tangible. They are concrete. They establish real relationships. And real relationships always demand some kind of sacrifice. The way people in the ancient Near East sealed a covenant was often through sacrifice. In walking through the sacrificed bodies of the animals, they were calling upon the blessing of being faithful to the covenant and the curse of being unfaithful. When God did this with Abram in Genesis 15, He established a real relationship where He placed Himself on the line. This is why Abraham and Isaac could trust God 7 chapters later on Mount Moriah. Jesus is the fulfillment, not only of the beloved Son sacrificed for many, but also of the fulfilled covenant. Specifically put, the sacrifice of Jesus (on the Cross and on the Altar at Mass) is the Sign and the Sacrifice of the "new and eternal covenant." Therefore, we can trust even more profoundly that Abraham and Isaac in offering our sacrifices to God.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you have any "disposable relationships" in your life? In the good ones, what makes them good? What are some reasons why "impermanent" relationships are not bad, but often helpful? Further, what are some traps people can fall into regarding "disposable relationships"?
2. If God enters into covenants (and not contracts) with His people, what are some ramifications for the way we live our lives? More to the point, if a contractual relationship says "you get certain *parts* of me", what does a covenantal relationship say? Are you living more contractually or covenantally?
3. Real relationships always involve some form of sacrifice. Do you agree with that? Why or why not? While there are some relationships that could be abusive in this regard, are there any relationships in your life where you could imagine having to make a "holocaust offering"? (Meaning: a total offering of yourself, holding nothing back?)
4. In the story of Abraham and Isaac, why were these men able to trust God? Does knowing the details of the story better change your perspective? In what way? How might you consider applying this lesson of testing to your life (knowing that you have been brought into an even greater covenant than Abraham)?
5. The Eucharist is the sign and the sacrifice of the new and eternal covenant. The Eucharist is *everything*. The Eucharist is God's "holocaust offering" of Himself; He held

nothing back. How might this knowledge affect the way you approach the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in upcoming weeks?

God in Real Life

- I. The covenant is not merely a piece of history. Because of the Holy Spirit, the covenant that Christ made in His own Body and Blood is made present on every altar at every Mass in every Catholic church throughout the world. The next time you go to Mass, realize that you are not simply “attending” Mass, you are offering the Great Sacrifice of the Son to the Father in the power of the Holy Spirit. You can also unite your offering (your “Isaac”) with the sacrifice of Jesus Himself...knowing that you can trust placing all things in God’s hands. Remember the curse God placed upon Himself, “If I am false to this covenant, let me be torn to pieces...but also let me be torn to pieces if you are false.”

Be Transformed

The key to understanding the Bible is the concept of covenant. In addition, each covenant typically involves a sacrifice:

- A. Read about the covenant God made with Abram in Genesis 15. You can see the various parts of the sacrifice as well as the promise God attached to the covenant. (Genesis 15)
- B. The Psalms refer to the covenants that God had made through history with His people. Some examples: Psalm 50:5; Numbers 19; Hebrews 9:13.
- C. The Letter to the Hebrews is filled with references to the sacrifice of Jesus as the sacrifice that has established the new and eternal covenant. (Hebrews 9 and 10 especially). Pay close attention to the notion of the “once for all” language in Hebrews 9:25-26. Please feel free to follow this link: <http://jimmyakin.com/jesus-once-for-all-sacrifice>
- D. The Catechism states: “The Holy Sacrifice, because it makes present the one sacrifice of Christ the Savior and includes the Church's offering. The terms holy sacrifice of the Mass, "sacrifice of praise," spiritual sacrifice, pure and holy sacrifice are also used, since it completes and surpasses all the sacrifices of the Old Covenant.” (CCC 1330)

To the Heart

"It was natural for early Christians to think of the Eucharist as a sacrifice. The fulfillment of prophecy demanded a solemn Christian offering, and the rite itself was wrapped in the sacrificial atmosphere with which our Lord invested the Last Supper. The words of institution, ‘Do this’ (touto poieite), must have been charged with sacrificial overtones for

second-century ears; Justin at any rate understood them to mean, 'Offer this.' . . . The bread and wine, moreover, are offered 'for a memorial (eis anamnasin) of the passion,' a phrase which in view of his identification of them with the Lord's body and blood implies much more than an act of purely spiritual recollection" (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* [Full Reference], 196–7).

The Didache

"Assemble on the Lord's day, and break bread and offer the Eucharist; but first make confession of your faults, so that your sacrifice may be a pure one. Anyone who has a difference with his fellow is not to take part with you until he has been reconciled, so as to avoid any profanation of your sacrifice [Matt. 5:23–24]. For this is the offering of which the Lord has said, 'Everywhere and always bring me a sacrifice that is undefiled, for I am a great king, says the Lord, and my name is the wonder of nations' [Mal. 1:11, 14]" (Didache 14 [A.D. 70]).

Pope Clement I

"Our sin will not be small if we eject from the episcopate those who blamelessly and holily have offered its sacrifices. Blessed are those presbyters who have already finished their course, and who have obtained a fruitful and perfect release" (Letter to the Corinthians 44:4–5 [A.D. 80]).

Ignatius of Antioch

"Make certain, therefore, that you all observe one common Eucharist; for there is but one Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, and but one cup of union with his Blood, and one single altar of sacrifice—even as there is also but one bishop, with his clergy and my own fellow servitors, the deacons. This will ensure that all your doings are in full accord with the will of God" (Letter to the Philadelphians 4 [A.D. 110]).

Justin Martyr

"God speaks by the mouth of Malachi, one of the twelve [minor prophets], as I said before, about the sacrifices at that time presented by you: 'I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord, and I will not accept your sacrifices at your hands; for from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same, my name has been glorified among the Gentiles, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the Gentiles . . . [Mal. 1:10–11]. He then speaks of those Gentiles, namely us [Christians] who in every place offer sacrifices to him, that is, the bread of the Eucharist and also the cup of the Eucharist" (Dialogue with Trypho the Jew 41 [A.D. 155]).

(references come from: <http://www.catholic.com/tracts/the-sacrifice-of-the-mass>)