Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

**High Priest and Sacrifice**

**Gen. 22:1-14 & Heb. 9:11-15**

Judica – 5th Sunday in Lent – 03.26.2023

I think sometimes we are not as familiar with what God required of His church after they came out of Egypt. We know some things, like how God used the plagues to lead Pharoah to release them from Egypt. We know that on Mount Sinai God gave them the Ten Commandments – and yet there was so much more to Torah. We also know that God made the descendants of Levi the priests for the people of Israel, with Aaron being the first High Priest.

But do you fully understand the main task of the priests were to carry out, the extent of the holiness and cleanliness laws? They were the ones God had chosen to stand between God and the people as intermediaries. They offered the sacrifices to God. We could go into much greater detail about the different sacrifices, but for brevity’s sake, we will simply say that they were offered for the sins of the people.

If you would like a better understanding of the specific sacrifices required for which sins – or required to make one clean from simple daily life events – and what had to be sacrificed for which festivals, the third book of the Torah – Leviticus – would be the best place to start.

But long before God instituted the Levitical priesthood, God Himself made the first sacrifice. It happened in the Garden. God killed animals from which He made garments of skin to cover Adam and Eve’s sinful disobedience of eating that fruit from the forbidden tree. As the priest He slaughtered the animals, shedding their blood to pay for the sins of Adam and Eve. He interceded for them to cover their sins.

We come to today’s text in Genesis to find Abraham taking his son, his only son whom he loves, to the mountain God has commanded him to go. On that mountain he is to obediently sacrifice his son Isaac to God. Isaac is the sacrifice. He is carrying the wood upon which he will be sacrificed. On the way to the mountain, Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here am I, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?” Abraham said, “God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.”

You heard what happened. They go up the mountain, Abraham builds the altar, lays the wood on it, binds Isaac his son and lays him on top of the wood. Before the knife falls, the Lord speaks to him – the pre-incarnate Word of God speaks to him – stopping the sacrifice. God stops the sacrifice because Abraham fears and trusts Him even more than he loves his own son. Do you understand that this is how you are to love God?

Abraham trusted that he would receive his own son back, after he sacrificed him to God. For three days, after God told him to make the sacrifice, in Abraham's mind, Isaac was dead. God had spoken, He had given a command, he would not refuse to do as God required. In his mind, Isaac was already dead, so he was already grieving. It was this third day that they arrived at the mountain and the sacrifice was to be made. At the point of offering Isaac as the sacrifice, the knife raised to kill him, God gives his son back to him alive. It is like God has raised him from the dead. Do you see God’s Christ yet?

However, a ram caught in the thicket by its horns they slaughter and sacrifice. But a ram is no lamb. Where is the Lamb which Abraham said that God would provide? If you do not see the prophetic nature of this event pointing to Christ yet, Abraham’s Lamb is coming. Abraham was pointing forward to the Lamb God Himself would provide. So, Abram calls the name of that place, "The Lord will provide."

John the baptizer is the one who points out this long awaited and promised Lamb for us. The very Lamb Abraham had foretold as the sacrifice God would provide so that he could have his son back alive is none other than Jesus. John helps us out by pointing to Jesus and declaring, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”

Yes, Abraham foretells the sacrifice of the beloved Son of the Father. This is the same mountain, where Jerusalem and the temple would be built. The temple where sacrifices were made for the sins of the people. The city which has a hill some named Golgotha.

When Abraham’s descendants, the people of Israel, come out of Egypt as twelve tribes, God commands the Levites to be set apart as high priests. They are sinners for they share the flesh and blood of those for whom they make sacrifice. For this reason they need to make sacrifices for their own sinfulness as well as for the sinfulness of the people. As the priests they stand before God on behalf of the people and with sacrifices, intercede for the people.

From our Epistle, we know that Jesus came as High Priest. *But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) He entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption.* (vv. 11-12) The tent of Christ’s body was by the miracle of the incarnation! Jesus took up human flesh in the Virgin without the normal use of a man. God took up residence in human flesh by work of the Holy Spirit through the Word spoken by the angel Gabriel.

Upon the cross, Christ entered the holy place – where “the Lord will provide.” He is the unblemished Lamb of sacrifice by His blood shed upon the cross. Jesus is the High Priest offering His own blood as the Lamb of God, the perfect sacrifice.

Jesus was sent by the Father for this purpose, to be both the sacrifice and High Priest, offering up Himself before the Father – interceding for sinners. His blood is not from the fallen creation – not the blood of lambs, sheep, bulls, or any other creature. He sheds the blood of Him who is both God and Man – His own blood.

I know, there are some who would say that Jesus was crucified, His life was taken ***from*** Him. But that is not what Jesus declares. He makes it clear that no one takes His life from Him, but He lays it down of His own accord. He has authority to lay it down and take it up again. All by the authority He was given by the Father. (John 10:18) He could have, as God, stopped the proceedings of His passion at any time and not gone through with it. However, you were more important to Him, that He be an obedient Son.

Today is Judica Sunday, it is the Sunday where we plead with God to judge us by pleading our cause. It is the blood of Christ – both sacrifice and Priest who pleads your case before His Father – His blood appeases the wrath against your sin. Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, in order to purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God in the same faith as your father, Abraham – now and forevermore. Amen.

This is exactly what Jesus is declaring in our Gospel lesson when He says, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of My own accord, but He sent Me.”

You and I know what obedience we owe to God for all that He has done for us. We know that we should trust Him in all things for we know all that He has provided for us. Everything we have is a gift from Him. He even gave His only begotten Son as the sacrifice for your failures in trusting Him.

How should you trust Him? Imagine God promising to make of you a great nation, that your descendants would number like the stars of the heavens. You are waiting decades to have a child. And it is only after you and your wife are far beyond child-bearing years that you have your first son. Your joy at God’s having finally fulfilled is shattered a few years later when God demands you sacrifice him – your ***ONLY*** beloved son. Do you trust God enough to do so? That is the faith and trust in God you are to have!

Do you trust that you will see, with your own eyes, God? That you believe that you will see your children forever, even though life in this mortal coil may come to an end?

Jesus comes to be Himself the sacrifice for your lack of obedience. In perfect faith, He entrusts His life into the Father’s hands – even as He is dying upon the cross. By His obedience, sacrificed unto death, He purchased redemption for the faithlessness, the failing trust of all mankind of every age. As your priest, He sacrificed His perfect obedience to appease God’s wrath – to obtain forgiveness for, and give that forgiveness to – those whose flesh He shares.

Your Priest sprinkles you – just as He sprinkled little Madison – with His blood of that perfect sacrifice, the waters of your baptism flowing from His riven side. He purifies you from dead works, forgiveness cleansing you of sin and granting you faith to trust in Him above all things. Purified in the blood of Christ, you are given a new life – a life lived in Christ. You are called to be holy Children of God, trusting solely and completely in your heavenly Father in Christ Jesus.

Today is Judica Sunday, it is the Sunday where we plead with God to judge us by pleading our cause. Christ, your High Priest, pleads your case before His Father. He makes the sacrifice of blood, a life given unto death to appease the wrath against your sinfulness.

Christ is the sacrifice! He, through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, in order to purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God in the same faith as your father, Abraham. Dearly beloved of God, live in that faith now and forevermore. Amen.