

The Blood of Christ  
Hebrews 9:11-14

Last week, we saw that one of the ways that the people celebrated the completion of the walls around Jerusalem was to purify themselves and to offer sacrifices. We saw that in this way, they were expressing not the pride of their accomplishments, but the humility born of an awareness of their sin. They were acknowledging that, no matter what great things they might have done for God, they were in themselves not worthy to come into His presence.

And the same thing is true for all of us today. For when we join the Church, we aren't supposed to put our best foot forward, the way we would when we go out on a date, or if we want to be chosen to join a fraternity or sorority. No, the Church is the only institution where all the members know they aren't good enough to join. Instead every one of us has to make a public confession that we are not in fact, worthy to be members.

That's one of the truths that all the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to. For whenever someone came to the Temple to worship God, he had to bring a goat or a bull or a calf with him. And he had to lay his hand on the head of that animal, identifying with it. And then he had to watch the priest kill it, and sprinkle some of its blood on the altar. Later on in Hebrews chapter 9, we find this chilling explanation: "Without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness."

And why is that? Because all of us, in one way or another, have been traitors to our Creator and our King. All of us, in one way or another, have been more interested in our own glory and pleasure, even though God made us to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. And we know that the penalty for such treason is death.

But there's another reminder that these sacrifices and purification rituals give us: that none of us are pure. None of us are holy. Spiritually speaking, we are just like those dead animals – lost, helpless, in desperate need of having the breath of life breathed back into us.

But the good news that we celebrate today is that, if we are all too familiar with our shame and guilt, if we truly understand our great need for a Savior, we can rejoice that we have such a Savior. For today's passage tells us in words the same thing we

experience at this table: that Jesus offered His own blood on the altar of God to redeem us, to pay the penalty for our treason, for our sin.

Yes, that's the good news: no matter what we may have done, no matter what we may have left undone, no matter how much shame or guilt we might feel, Jesus offers Himself to us as our perfect sacrifice, as our redeeming Savior, as our reigning King. He only asks us to admit our helplessness, to trust Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves, to surrender to His righteous rule in our lives.

But here's the most amazing part. As we respond to His gracious free gift by faith, trusting Him as our Savior and bowing the knee to Him as our Lord, we are actually doing spiritually what we will do physically in a moment: we take His death and resurrection, His very self into ourselves, becoming one with Him. That means that just as He died on the cross, we are also dead to the power of sin in our lives. And just as He walked out of His tomb on the third day, we are also empowered to live a new life, His life instead of our own.

That's what we celebrate here: as Jesus' blood is poured out not onto but into all those who trust in Him, we are not only forgiven, but we are purified, cleaned from the inside out. As His lifeblood, as His Holy Spirit enters us, we are enabled to live His life, a life of perfect consecration to God, a life of selfless service to others.

So let's prepare our hearts to come to the table and receive not just forgiveness and not just cleansing, but to receive Christ Himself as we sing all three stanzas of our communion hymn, Break Thou the Bread of Life.