

MAN AS A EUCHARISTIC BEING: SACRIFICE

For man, sacrifice is a way of being. It is a major expression or a first revelation of life itself. It is life's spiritual content. Where there is no sacrifice, there is no life. Sacrifice is rooted in the recognition of life as love: as giving up, not because I want more for myself, or to satisfy an objective justice (that which is right in and of itself), but because it is the only way of reaching the fullness that is possible for me. (cf. *Liturgy and Tradition*, Schmemmann, 129)

Consider the fact that by and large theology, religion and popular understanding see sacrifice as a means of atonement, expiation, reparation and redemption, and rightfully. This naturally fits Judeo-Christian theology. In our tradition it is the sin of Adam and Eve that ushered in the need for expiation, atonement, reparation and redemption. Man cannot repair the damage caused by sin on his own. In Judaism the ministry of the priesthood of was powerless to cleanse the conscience of the people. *"Every priest of the old covenant stands daily at his ministry, offering frequently those same sacrifices that can never take away sins (Heb 10:12), for it is impossible that the blood of bulls and goats take away sins (Heb 10:4). And yet, without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).* All sin for men begins with the original sin. The root of sin is intrinsically tied to first sin, that is, biblically, to the fall of Adam and Eve. As soon as we are given the biblical understanding of the origin of sin, sacrifice is unveiled as a means through which man offers himself to God. The scriptures teach us:

In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil, while Abel, for his part, brought one of the best firstlings of his flock. (Gen. 4:3-4)



Sacrifice is a way of life, the very same life God gave to Adam and Eve in the beginning. Perhaps the most poignant expression of this truth comes to us in the story of Abraham and his son Isaac. God says to Abraham: *"Take your son Isaac, your only one, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah. There you shall offer him up as a holocaust on a height that I will point out to you."* (Gen 22:2)

God does not allow Abraham to make of his son Isaac a sacrifice. Rather this is a test of Abraham and his faith in God and, even more, it is a prefigurement of God's definitive response to sin, the offering of His only begotten Son. In the words of St. Paul, *"But when the fullness of time had come, God sent His Son born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law, so that we might receive adoption."* (Gal. 4:3-5)

Abraham represents man's necessary disposition toward God: trust and surrender. God, in turn, gives Himself perfectly and completely to man. In effect, God contains within Himself the very imprint of sacrifice. He is the preeminent sacrifice. He is the Eternal Gift, the One who offers Himself up, not only as the atonement, expiation, and reparation for sin, as well as the act of redemption, but summarily as an act of love so as to set the paradigm for man for the very essence and meaning of love. Love is defined and constituted by sacrifice.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish but might have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him. . . Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life." (John 3:16-17;15)

For a man to express love, it is innately within his being able to offer himself. To be a lover, man is first to offer sacrifice to God. Only then can he begin to love his spouse and from that love his progeny. Therefore, all men are priestly in as much as they love sacrificially. For man to love is to sacrifice for the sake of another.

From the Pastor Fr. Alex