

## Is the Mass Truly a Sacrifice?

This discussion builds upon the one entitled *EUCCHARIST - Are the bread and wine really the Body and Blood of Jesus?*. To fully understand this discussion, one should read and understand EUCCHARIST first.

In Malachi 1:11 (the last book of the Old Testament) we read "In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations". In Romans 12:1 it says "offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship". Are we the pure offerings we read of in Malachi? Each of us is a sinner and thus less than pure so what is Paul talking about when he says that we are to offer our bodies? The pure offering is the offering of Jesus the Christ, the unblemished Lamb of God, who offers himself for us. We'll get back to the offering of Jesus in a moment, but first let's look at the offering of ourselves.

Since we are less than pure, how can we be made holy and pleasing to God? First, the sacrament of Baptism removes the stain of original sin and all sins committed up to the moment of baptism ["baptism, which saves you now" (1 Peter 3:21)]. Second, the sacrament of Penance (also known as Reconciliation or Confession) forgives sin ["If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven" (John 20:23)]. And finally, we must live the life of Christ ["if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:22-23)]. If we can offer ourselves, as living sacrifices, free from mortal and venial sin and clear in conscience; we will be holy and pleasing to God. This offering is made when we recite the *Eucharistic Prayer* response "Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord". By this act we are placing our lives on the altar along with the bread and wine as our offering to God; we have become living sacrifices to be offered with the offering of Jesus the Christ.

But, you say, Hebrews 10:10 says that the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ was once for all. This is true! Jesus sacrifice was done once. He died the one and only time on the cross, for all persons for all time. However, His offering is perpetually (for all time) being made in Heaven and through the Mass we join in this offering in an unbloody manner. How can this be? First let's build a little background:

Hebrews 9:1-5 (we could also use Exodus 26 but it's a little more concise here) gives us a very good description of the tabernacle (not the one behind the altar, but the one Moses built). The tabernacle is divided into two sections, the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies, separated by a veil. In the outer section (the Holy Place) we find the menorah, the table, and the bread of offering. In Revelation 1, we find that John, in his vision into Heaven, is seeing into the Holy Place as he describes seven gold lamp stands (the menorah) and the risen Christ; the bread come down from heaven, the Bread of Life. Moving along to Revelation 4, we find the open door in Heaven [the veil which was rent from top to bottom at the moment Jesus died on the cross (Matthew 27:51) and a throne. The inner portion of the tabernacle of Moses (and the temple of David) contained the cherubim throne (Ark of the Covenant) so John must now be looking from the Holy Place into the Holy of Holies. Going back now to Hebrews 9 verses 6-10, we are given a description of the priestly tabernacle duties; especially those of the High Priest. Revelation 5 tells us of a Lamb that

seems to have been slain which in the Holy of Holies. Scholars all agree that this is the Lamb of God, the new High Priest. What does the High Priest do in the Holy of Holies? Offers sacrifice, not without blood, for the sins of the people. What sacrifice does the new High Priest offer? Himself; He entered the Holy of Holies through the shedding of His own blood on the altar of the cross. What John is witnessing and relating to us all is that Jesus, in the Eternal Now of Heaven, is continually offering His most perfect sacrifice in our behalf. The bloody sacrifice was offered once on Calvary and this sacrifice, without blood or suffering because Jesus died only once, continues to be offered for us all for all time in Heaven. The key to understanding this happening is to understand that in Heaven there is no past or future, only the Eternal Now; because God is independent of time. What John saw is the same thing which is always going on; perfect praise and honor to God.

When Jesus, at the Last Supper, said "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Corinthians 11:24-25), what was He saying? Was He saying go through the motions of a meal and do a little play-acting with your twelve closest friends, or was He saying something more? Just before He said "do this" He said "This is My Body" and "This is My Blood" and since Jesus is God, by saying it, it became so (and God said "Let there be light..."). Therefore, since He told His Apostles to "do this" He at that instant, gave them the power to transform the bread and wine into His Body and Blood (an action which was defined much later by the technical term *transubstantiation*), just as He had done. Today when the priest says the words of consecration, our offering is joined with the bread and wine which has become the Body and Blood of Jesus to the offering which Jesus, the High Priest and Sacrificial Lamb, is continually offering in the Eternal Now of Heaven as the one pure sacrifice for the glory of God.

The Passover of the Jews was to be celebrated every year (Exodus 12:14) but the New Passover could be celebrated more often (1 Corinthians 11:26). In fact, we find in Acts 2:46 that they met every day for the breaking of bread. This was (and is) not merely a **representation** of the events which took place in the upper room and on the cross, but a **re-presentation**. In the case of the Old Covenant, each year when the Passover was celebrated, the participants were not merely remembering what had happened before, but were actually renewing their covenant with God by re-presenting the event. Likewise, those of us of the New Covenant renew our covenant with God by re-presenting the event by which it was enacted; a sacrificial ritual which was determined by God. Each and every Mass that we participate in renews our covenant which makes us children of God; members of God's family and joint heirs with Jesus the Christ (Romans 8:16-17).