

Catechumenate Session

APPRENTICES IN FAITH: A Resource for the RCIA
Second Sunday of Lent • Year B • February 25, 2024



*Everlasting God,
as the heavens
tower above the Earth,
so you are far above us.
Yet you shower us
with your love.
May we always offer
to you a sacrifice of praise
and thanksgiving through
your Son, Jesus Christ.
Amen.*

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Sunday Word

Genesis 22:1-2, 9a, 10-13, 15-18
Psalm 116:10, 15, 16-17, 18-19
Romans 8:31b-34
Mark 9:2-10

Here I Am!

When God calls, Abraham does not hesitate. He steps forward and does the will of the Most High. He passes the test of faith and so God pledges fidelity to Abraham and his offspring.

Who Can Be Against Us?

Saint Paul asks and answers this rhetorical question: nothing and nobody has power over us, for God hands over his own Son to be our Savior. By the blood of his Cross, Christ intercedes for us before the throne of God.

This Is My Beloved Son!

The divine voice from Heaven commands that Peter, James, and John—and by extension, all followers of Jesus—listen to and follow the Christ. He is the beloved Son of God, whose rising from the dead we ponder as a great mystery of faith.

Church Teaching: Sacrificial Offering

The Thread of Sacrifice

There is a strong theme of sacrifice that runs throughout Sacred Scripture. Each of today's readings touches on sacrifice. Abraham prepares his son Isaac as a sacrificial offering to God. Saint Paul speaks of how God's own Son, Jesus Christ, is not spared but "handed over" for our sakes. After the Transfiguration, Peter, James, and Andrew come down from the mountain asking about the Son of Man's impending death.

Jesus Christ, the Son of Man, is the pinnacle sacrifice of the new Covenant. In him we find the fulfillment of all God's covenantal promises described in the Old Testament. Thus, the sacrifice prefigured by Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac is perfectly realized in Jesus, who freely offers himself to the Father as a ransom for our sins. The Son of Man seals in his blood the new and eternal Covenant.

Our Own Offering of Self to God

Nomads of the ancient Near East commonly offered animals or produce to the deity they worshiped. The ancient Israelites pursued such customs as well. Once they settled in Canaan, they offered sacrifice to the one true and living God at the Temple in Jerusalem. Burnt offerings were the highest tribute, because all of the offering was consumed and lifted up to the Most High.

Over time, sacrifice came to express not only praise and thanksgiving but also expiation of sin. The prophets exhorted the people not to be content with physical offerings. The people were to make spiritual sacrifices of contrition and mercy so that a humbled heart was given over to God.

From the beginning with Abraham, human sacrifice was forbidden among Israelites, despite its presence in surrounding pagan cultures. Today's First Reading underscores this prohibition. The angel commands Abraham not to harm his son Isaac.

Despite the prohibition against human sacrifice, Christians perceive in the event of the Crucifixion the ultimate sacrificial offering to God for the expiation of human sinfulness. Jesus Christ is both the Sacrificial Lamb and the High Priest (see John 1:29, Hebrews 4:14). This one sacrifice supersedes all other Old Testament sacrifices. The Temple in Jerusalem is no longer necessary. We have in Christ himself a new temple not made with human hands. The eternal and everlasting Covenant is established in the Body and Blood of the Risen Lord.

Distinctiveness of Church Teaching

The Eucharist makes present for us this once-for-all sacrifice of Christ. The Eucharist is also the sacrifice of the body of believers, the Church. In celebrating this sacramental action, the Body of Christ is united to the Head, who is Jesus. In this way, the Church offers herself to God as the sacrament of Salvation.

Thus, the lives of the faithful are offered to the Father in the Son and through the Spirit. All of our praise, sufferings, difficulties, prayer, and good works are united with Christ and are made perfect in his own total sacrificial offering.

Key Terms

EXPIATION

Redeeming and atoning act for sin; ultimately Christ accomplishes expiation of our sins through his self-offering on the Cross (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 616).

SACRIFICE

Ritual offering made to God as a sign of worship, gratitude, or supplication; Christ's own self-sacrifice being the most perfect (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1357).

TEMPLE

Place of worship in Jerusalem where priestly rites and sacrifices were offered; destroyed in AD 70 by the Romans when they sacked Jerusalem (see *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 586).

Voices of Faith

Offering himself to the Father as a new and real sacrifice of reconciliation, he was crucified—not in the temple . . . or within the enclosure of the city . . . but outside. . . . That way, as the mystery of the ancient sacrifices was ceasing, a new victim would be put on the altar, and the cross of Christ would be the altar not of the temple but of the world.

—Saint Pope Leo the Great

Since the Eucharist makes present Christ's redeeming sacrifice, we must start by acknowledging that "there is a causal influence of the Eucharist at the Church's very origins." The Eucharist is Christ who gives himself to us and continually builds us up as his body.

—Pope Benedict XVI

Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: 583 (Jesus and the temple), 606 (Christ's whole life an offering), 608 (the Lamb of God), 613 (unique, definitive sacrifice)

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults:

Chapter 17, especially the section entitled "The Mass Is a Sacrifice," pages 220–222

Compendium—Catechism of the Catholic Church:

119 (Jesus offers himself to the Father), 280 (Mass as memorial of Christ's sacrifice)