

Fear of Sacrifice - Bulldog Catholic

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April 26, 2018



Q: I'm afraid of sacrifice. Not that I am afraid of giving up stuff or letting go of what I need to let go of, but I am afraid of what God might possibly call me to sacrifice some day.

A: Thank you for writing. Your fear totally makes sense. And I imagine that there are many people who will read this who have a similar fear: what will God make me give up to prove that I love Him? I think that the primary reason why we are afraid of sacrifice in this sense is because most people have this lingering fear somewhere in their brain that, when it comes down to it, God is irrational, fickle, and demanding.

Because of this, we don't trust Him. After all, He says that He loves us, but who knows when He might ask us to give up our first-born child? I mean, you know the story. In one of the first chapters in the very first book of the Bible, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his own beloved son! That seems pretty irrational, fickle, and demanding!

But let's look a bit more closely at this story. First, it is crucial to note this fact: at this point in their relationship, Abraham and God have a very long history. God asks this sacrifice of Abraham after God has demonstrated time after time that Abraham can absolutely trust Him. And not only that Abraham can trust God with his most precious things, but also the fact that Abraham knows what God's voice sounds like. In more modern terms, Abraham knew how to discern God's voice from a crazy thought he might have had or from the voice of the Evil One.

Second, and this is very important to remember: no one died in this story! (Except the ram.) Part of the point of the story is God's affirmation that he does not want human sacrifice. He makes this abundantly clear.

God reveals through this story (as well as through the rest of Scripture) that He is not irrational or fickle. He never asks someone, "So you love me? Why don't you prove it by just arbitrarily throwing away something that means a lot to you?" Biblical sacrifice is never arbitrary. And yet, sacrifice does exist. Why?

Pope Benedict XVI described biblical sacrifice like this: "In all religions sacrifice is at the heart of worship. But this is a concept that has been buried under the debris of endless misunderstandings."

...It means handing over to God a reality that is in some way precious to man. – Pope Benedict XVI

I maintain that a part of those misunderstandings include the idea that sacrifice is arbitrary; that God just asks for whatever is most valuable to us so that we can't have it. Pope Benedict points out that "...the common view is that sacrifice has something to do with destruction. It means handing over to God a reality that is in some way precious to man.

Now this handing over presupposes that it is withdrawn from use by man, and that can only happen through its destruction, its definitive removal from the hands of man."

If this is the case, then the heart of worship is destroying something of value in the Name of God. But is that all that God wants? Pious vandals? Pope Benedict asks, "What pleasure is God supposed to take in destruction? Is anything really surrendered to God through destruction?"

Think about what God asks in sacrificial worship. It is almost always connected to our first-fruits. The firstborn animal or the first-fruits of the crops. Even the first-fruits of our time are given to God. What is that all about? At the heart, the sacrifice of this "stuff" or this "time" is an act of trust. We are saying, "God, I give you the very first of this day, or this week, or this paycheck knowing that you will be there after this is offered."

All of the real suffering in the world comes from this: refusal to trust God.

You might think of it like this: the reason why we are asked to sacrifice is because we are afraid to sacrifice. Go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve refused to trust God. All of the real suffering in the world comes from this: refusal to trust God. Every sin, every disobedience, all clinging and asserting one's self comes from the refusal to trust God. Therefore the heart of worship is an act of trust; the surrender of something precious. Not because God needs it. But because our hearts need it.

For Christians, we know that the end of sacrifice is neither mere surrender nor destruction. On the cross, Jesus sacrifices His very life (surrender and destruction). But that is not the end of the sacrifice. Transformation happens. His sacrifice redeems and transforms the world. Pope Benedict says that, in light of Christ's sacrifice, "...we can now say that the goal of worship...[is] divinization, a world of freedom and love."

What does this mean for us today? Our worship is participating in the one sacrifice of Jesus at Mass. This does not mean "watching" the Mass. It means participating in the sacrifice. By lifting up the sacrifice of Jesus in the Eucharist, but also by offering (surrendering) ourselves with Him on the altar. Every part of our lives that we refuse to join to Christ's sacrifice will simply end. But, handed over to God through Jesus, with Jesus, and in Jesus, your whole life is not destroyed...it becomes something new.