



Hebrews 10:11-14.19-25; Mark 13:1-8
Reverend Giuseppe Mattei (November 17, 2024)

Hebrews 10 exposes the futility of the priest's daily sacrifice, a routine that cannot save nor take guilt away: It is not a lasting solution to the problem of sin. The priest stands pleading and performing the blood sacrifice that would hopefully calm the wrath of God and cleanse one from sins.¹ It's a yearly event meant for a public display of the pervasive power of sin and a reminder that the animal sacrifice (better than the human sacrifice)² is neither perfect nor efficacious.³

Conversely, Christ's self-sacrifice is a one-time affair, perfect and salvific. His sacrifice was not simply in his last days ending with his death on a cross but his whole life, generously and faithfully dedicated to loving all. And after this life-long labor of love, he can enter into God's rest.⁴

For this reason, we are invited to understand that there really is nothing we can do to please God, be saved, and have eternal life but to trust God. It's a gift. We call it grace.

God can be a whole number of things to us according to how we choose to relate to God. Some people keep God at the periphery of their life, a nebulous entity that has really no meaning or effect in our life. Some others do keep God at the center of their

¹ Hebrews 10:11

² Genesis 22:1-13; Leviticus 18:21

³ Hebrews 10:1-3

⁴ Hebrews 10:12; Hebrews 3:19; Psalm 95; Exodus 33:14; Philippians 4:6-7

life, but God is rather an afterthought, a last resort to our ailments, like a vending machine to go to in time of need or a beautiful monument to look at.

God can be the immovable Mover, the one-time Creator, the distant Father, the absentee Landlord, or the supreme Judge to Whom we must give an account when we meet face to face.⁵

But those perceptions of God are very limited. They leave us cold, indifferent, unrestrained, or fearful. For some people, God is just a word. For others, a tremendous Law Giver constantly threatening and measuring us up.

We struggle with these aspects of God. We live emotionally disengaged, alone in despair, or in constant fear. Those kinds of perceptions are emotionally draining and disappointing.

It doesn't have to be that way.

Jesus' life has accomplished what no sacrifice can do. By taking on our suffering and the sin that produces it and is produced by it like in a loop, Jesus has brought before God our human condition: in him, with him and through him we enter through the veil of the Temple and have access to God.

It isn't our doing but God's supreme gift.

Our culture insists that we must be inventive, self-reliant, and pull ourselves up by our bootstraps.⁶ Does it work?

A person enters a bookstore, goes straight to the customer service desk, and asks: "Could you tell me where I can find the

⁵ We will never see a resolution to so much evil in our lifetime. We need the Law in our life as a guiding light and a boundary setting framework. The Law offers safety for the interactions within the community and regulates healthy living. Our self-defeating ego is under God's check.

⁶ <https://www.csmonitor.com/The-Culture/In-a-Word/2021/1004/How-the-bootstrap-idiom-became-a-cultural-ideal>

Self-Help section?” The answer came swiftly: “If I told you it would defeat the purpose.”

Our own attempts at saving ourselves can be disappointing and go just so far. Union with God happens in the Spirit. We are invited to surrender to God and receive the grace, the Word of life, in prayerful meditation and gratitude.

Hebrews' author states that, "by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."⁷ It's Jesus who presents us to God “holy.” God's future is now in process. It is happening among those who "are being consecrated." They are part of the world God is constantly drawing toward union with one another and the triune God.

The process is initiated by God in the Spirit through Jesus. The “perfecting” or “sanctification,” however, does not happen without our cooperation.

The Letter to the Hebrews (ch. 10) lays out a simple path:

- Approach God in honesty of heart in total trust (v. 22)
- Persevere in hope and hold on to God’s promises (v. 23)
- Be creative in love and in deeds (v. 24) and
- Worship together (v. 25)

...for the Day is approaching.

May we rejoice in God’s gift in Jesus and be bold and trustful in hope. Amen.

⁷ Hebrews 10:14