

Second Reading: Hebrews 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25

Images of worship and sacrifice are used throughout Hebrews to highlight what Christ has uniquely accomplished through his death. Because we have received forgiveness through Christ's death, we live with sincere hearts by trusting in God's promises and encouraging love and good works from each other.

¹¹Every priest stands day after day at his service, offering again and again the same sacrifices that can never take away sins. ¹²But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, "he sat down at the right hand of God," ¹³and since then has been waiting "until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet." ¹⁴For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. [¹⁵And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us, for after saying,

¹⁶"This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds,"

¹⁷he also adds,

"I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more."

¹⁸Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.]

¹⁹Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, ²⁰by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), ²¹and since we have a great priest over the house of God, ²²let us approach with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. ²⁴And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Gospel: Mark 13:1-8

In the last week of his life, Jesus warned his disciples concerning trials that were to come upon them and upon the world. He exhorts the listener: Do not be alarmed.

¹As [Jesus] came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" ²Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

³When he was sitting on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter, James, John, and Andrew asked him privately, ⁴"Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?" ⁵Then Jesus began to say to them, "Beware that no one leads you astray. ⁶Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!' and they will lead many astray. ⁷When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come. ⁸For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be earthquakes in various places; there will be famines. This is but the beginning of the birth pangs."

The gospel text for this morning places us at a different point in the ministry of Jesus. As we begin to wind down the church year and unbelievably begin to anticipate Advent, the focus of the lessons turns to not only the end of this church year, but also all endings, including the ending of our lives and the world as we know it. In the Gospel text, the disciples begin asking questions concerning the signs of the end times. As humans living in this world, there is always a strong curiosity to the issues concerning the final days of this earth. Why is it that you suppose our attention peaks when we hear this kind of talk? Why is it that many people get so caught up in the how and when of the final days of this planet?

Maybe one reason is that in our intent to live each day to the fullest, we realistically hold back on things knowing that we need to be prepared for tomorrow and to endure any consequences of today's actions. If we know on one given day that it would be our last, how much different would we live and use the resources around us. But also, on the other side of the coin, there are many who desire to know when the last day will come so that they might have an opportunity to get ready, to get their ducks in a row, one might say. This perspective usually involves one of trying to make amend for past experiences, seeking to "get right with God," as the phrase sometimes goes.

Obviously, if anyone of us know what day we would be confronted with our mortality, or when human life on this earth was going to end, it would be a self-deception to think we wouldn't do anything different. However, there is something to be said about our relationship with our Creator during those circumstances. From the Old Testament we have learned many things about our faith history. One of those aspects involves a word from the prophet Jeremiah. This is quoted within our second

lesson. In his writings, he says on behalf of the Lord: "This is the covenant I will establish with them after those days, says the Lord: 'I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them upon their minds.'"

Basically, the thrust of this passage is telling us that we will know the law of God, what God's intention, not only from our minds recollection of the facts, but we will also feel it in our hearts. In other words, we will know that we have done wrong to our self, to another, or to the world. This has certainly been the case with most of our lives. We usually know when our intent is a selfish one, we usually know when we have used our advantage over another for gainful reward. We do not have to sit down and read all the laws of the Old Testament or the State of Ohio, to know we acted out of selfishness. It is usually apparent to us. So, it is very true that the laws of right relationship with others and with God, do seemed to be ingrained in our hearts and our minds. So, if given the opportunity to somehow know or accurately predict our life's end, living with this passage in our minds, the final hours can become ones of fear and intimidation. In this fear, we would scramble to get our ducks in a row, so we would be "right" with God.

However, if we direct our lives in this fashion, we are missing the Good News. What becomes a little more difficult to believe and to practice is the New Testament ending word, ending message, to the Jeremiah proclamation. The message of Christ and the teachings of the early disciples hold this passage of Hebrews before us, as it continues in verse 17. It reads: "he also adds, 'I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more. Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin.'" So, if we take the free message of forgiveness seriously, and act upon it in our lives, the last days of earth talk become not one of scrambling, impossibly, to get my record wiped clean, but instead can

become one of savoring the gifts given to me in this life. To live out forgiveness, gives us a complete fresh outlook on ourselves, on each other, on the world, on our daily actions, and our approach to God. To live out forgiveness, as told by the witnesses of Christ, we discover that indeed we are truly set free.

There's a story about a man who has just bought a new car. As he approached his home in the country, he decided to see how fast it would go. He raced up his long driveway, and out to the road, and raced up it about a mile or so. Then he made a sharp U-turn and came speeding back toward his own driveway. Another driver on the same road, saw this man make this incredible quick U-turn back toward him, and from his high rate of speed, the driver of this second car incorrectly deduced that the fast car must be an unmarked police car. Thus, he, in an effort to hide, spun his own car into the man's long driveway. Meanwhile the fast driver immediately noticing the other car, slowed down and turned into his own driveway to return to his home. When the driver of the other car realized that he was in someone's driveway, and not another road, and that this other car had pulled in behind him, he panicked, jumped out of his car, and ran into the nearby woods. It turns out that the car was full of stolen merchandise. The man in his guilty conscience, let his imagination make him believe in a scenario that was not occurring.

Living in guilt does affect us. To live out the freedom we have in the forgiving word of Christ, does indeed shape our worldview and actions. If we approach life from simply the "Law" standpoint, without the Gospel, the words of Jesus in the thirteenth chapter of Mark become threatening.

To live out the promise that God, in Christ Jesus, has wiped our slate clean, is a radical way to approach life. For it means, we too can forgive

others. It means that we can let ourselves off the hook in our faith life and let the Holy Spirit guide us into freedom. In the life of Jesus, we are taught that our sins are completely forgiven, that in our relationship with God, God ignores them and puts them away. The same God who cares for us so deeply that we are told that he never forgets a sparrow or the number of hairs on our head, leaves our sin fall to the wayside. Now with our relationship with God, we do not have to offer up some type of sacrificial burnt offering, as many did in the Old Testament, instead we now have the words, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, who has gone ahead of us all. There is no longer anything we can do to make God stop loving us. God has conquered the great divide.

There's a story about a man who owned a Rolls Royce. While on vacation, there was a mechanical failure. The man called the company from which he had bought the car, and they flew in a mechanic from England to repair it. After waiting a number of weeks for the bill for the repair job, the man wrote the company and asked for his bill. He received back a response which read: "We have no record of any Rolls Royce that has ever had a mechanical failure."

The same record is true of our great forgiving God. With the life of Christ, we are promised forgiveness, love, and acceptance, that will supersede even our own limits and expectations. Our task is to begin living out that truth. Amen.