

THE BRAZEN ALTAR

MAY 21, 2018

Today we are continuing our Old Testament study. We are picking up with the tabernacle altar, the brazen altar of sacrifice. I'm thinking that this is a really good time to have this discussion on the sacrifice and the blood and the fire that we are going to do next week. The fire is parallel to purgatory.

So we are talking about the brazen altar. There is something about the idea of all of these animal sacrifices of the Old Testament that I have found in teaching the study that it is sort of offensive to some people. I am thinking of an instance in which I did this study with a neighboring church of about 8,000 families. I wrote this study and it is a study that this parish did like a small group study. (In fact, if you want your parish to do it as well I have those books so if you want to do this let me know. Drop me a line and I can get you those books.) It was kind of interesting in one of those groups because I tried to visit each of the groups as they were doing the study and the lessons, and I went to one that included a veterinarian. We did this particular lesson in this group, and he was not only appalled but I think he was scandalized. It bothered him so very much, and it bothered me because I couldn't help him get over that. It's not my place to do that, that is really the Holy Spirit and I shouldn't probably have been so concerned about it. He was just so very vocal, and not only was he vocal but by the end of the time together he got almost militant and I worried for the other people in the group. In any case, it can be a bloody meditation. We are going to look at it in that way, with a little twist, when we get to the last segment of the show.

Before we plow in, I just want to review that through the tabernacle God communicated his desire to dwell with humanity. He also, in doing so, detailed the type of worship that would welcome him most fully. It also specified the things and the worship that would draw us more closely to him. It's about the communion between us and God. It's not about me. It's not about what I like. For instance, I saw an article from the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith that specifies that we should not, as Catholics, be cremated and have our ashes scattered because as human beings we are both body and soul. To scatter them out into nature sort of implies that there is nothing left at all after death, that our body just rots and goes back into the earth and there is nothing left after that, but as Christians, especially as Catholic Christians, we maintain that unity with the Christians before us and who will come after us. What we are saying by a burial is that we are anticipating the resurrection of the body. When we talk about this whole tabernacle idea and this whole worship idea, we have to always keep in mind that it is not about us. We are not the only Christians who have ever lived or will ever live. We can't just decide that we want things one way or the other when they affect everyone. That's where I was going with that story.

Liturgy ties us to the past, and we see that here in the Old Testament, but it also looks forward to the future in heaven. We are going to look at that in great detail today, I hope. God dictated this design and worship of the tabernacle to Moses, and in so doing he spoke forth this sort of description of who and what the future Messiah was going to be like, and also the church that was founded on him, the church that would actually be his body. The tabernacle foreshadowed Christ who became flesh and tabernacle among us. Remember that the word tabernacle means "to dwell" or "to live". God is tabernacling with us. He did so in the Old Testament through a portable tent structure. He did so in

052118_The Brazen Altar

the New Testament through Christ himself, who claimed he is the new temple, and he is in his body. As he left us in the ascension and the Holy Spirit fell, we became animated with his spirit. We are the hands and feet and the body of Christ, and we also shall be resurrected with him. That is why we have to be resurrected, because we are his body and his body was resurrected. The Holy Spirit will resurrect us all in the judgment at the last day. He tabernacles among us, in us. We are tabernacles. It first began in Mary. She was the tabernacle because she carried him in her womb. Then, it was in Jesus, the man god. Now it is in the mystical body, the Church. We should think about how Jesus tabernacles with us in the Church. We are going to do that by looking at the Old Testament furniture.

As I posted in the radio notes, the very first thing that you see as you walk into the gate, which faced east. To this day if you go or see on television the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem, which is one of the last walls of the Old Testament that is still standing and in its place is a mosque up on the hill in Jerusalem where the temple used to stand. It is called the Wailing Wall by the Jews and they pray, and you will see them rocking back and forth and they wail as they are praying. When we think about the tabernacle structure and the temple, and even in our churches, our churches are supposed to face east so that the mass is offered toward the east so that we are always looking in the direction that Jesus says he will return. He left and will return at the second coming from the east, the Bible says. So, you enter through that eastern gate and the very first facility that you see there is like (and I am not trying to be blasphemous, I'm just trying to give you the picture) an enormous barbeque grill. It was huge. It was big enough to hold an entire ox. It was that large. It was made like a grill. I also posted a picture of what it may have looked like, so you can look on the radio notes and see the picture of that altar. In Leviticus 1 we start to learn how and what this altar was used for. I don't want to read the whole thing, but it is interesting and it gives us some background, so I am going to read part of it.

“The Lord called Moses, and spoke to him from the tent of meeting, saying, “Speak to the people of Israel, and say to them, When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of cattle from the herd or from the flock. “If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer a male without blemish; he shall offer it at the door of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the Lord.” So, they brought the sacrifice right to the gate there, and that was as far as he was allowed to go. “he shall lay his hand upon the head of the burnt offering...” The offeror puts his hand on the offering, the animal, that is going to be sacrificed “...and it will be accepted for him to make atonement for him.” What is implied there is that as the offeror puts his hand on the living animal that is about to be sacrificed that he also confesses his sin on that animal. The animal is going to be slain and the blood poured out on the altar to show that the animal is going to take the judgement for the offeror's sin, if it is a sin offering. I will talk about the difference in offering in just a few minutes. “Then he shall kill the bull before the Lord; and Aaron's sons the priests shall present the blood, and throw the blood round about against the altar that is at the door of the tent of meeting.” Notice that he puts his hand on the offering and then he kills it before the Lord and the priest. “And he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces; and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar, and lay wood in order upon the fire; and Aaron's sons the priests shall lay the pieces, the head, and the fat, in order upon the wood that is on the fire upon the altar; but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn the whole on the altar, as a burnt offering, an offering by fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord.” It's interesting to note there that this is the only sacrifice that is completely burned up.

I mentioned that the offeror put his hand on the head of the offering, of the animal that was about to be sacrificed, and that implies that he places his own sin on that animal that is about to be sacrificed, and then he kills the offering himself. That offering obviously is a very personal and intimate kind of

052118_The Brazen Altar

thing about to happen between the person and the animal. I don't know about you but that breaks me up quite a bit. You can also see that nobody could send another person to offer the sacrifices for his or her own sins. By the same token you can't send somebody else to accept the atonement that Jesus Christ makes for your sin either. Each person is responsible individually to accept that sacrifice on behalf of his or her own sin.

There's a whole lot involved in all of these sacrifices. I don't have time to go through all of them, and it's not really necessary anyway. I am just going to kind of run them all together. The burnt offerings signified atonement for sin and complete dedication to God. They were according to wealth. The most wealthy offered an unblemished bull, then the next level would be a male sheep or goat, and if they were poor it would be turtledoves or young pigeons. The sin offerings were offered for sins that were committed unknowingly, especially if there wasn't any restitution possible. In Numbers 15:30-31 we see that there was no offering even available in the case of any sort of defiant rebellion against God. Then there was a trespass offering that atoned for sins committed unknowingly also, but this was one in which restitution was possible. The sin offering was when there was no restitution (or penance, as we would call it now). The trespass offering was when there was a possible restitution or penance.

One of the main ideas here that I want to go back to is this kind of idea of presumptuous sin. In Numbers 15:30 it says, "But the person who does anything presumptuously, whether he is native or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the Lord and he shall be cut off from among his people because he has despised the word of the Lord and has broken his commandment. That person shall be completely cut off. His guilt shall be upon him." Listen, people. Two things: First of all, the differences in the wealth of the person and his offerings and the seriousness of the offerings often were indicated by the type of the offering that the person was asked to make. If you were wealthy or if you committed a dire sin of some sort, then you offered a particular kind of sacrifice. If you were poor or it was a more minor sin then you offered a smaller sacrifice. This flies in the face of what I was taught when I was growing up that sin is sin, it's all one thing. That is not true and that is not what the Catholic Church teaches. The Catholic Church teaches exactly what the scriptures say here. In Numbers 15:30 what we see is a mortal sin. If you sin willingly then you have cut yourself off from the community and from God himself. There was no possible restitution in the Old Testament. There was no offering even available for sin that was presumptuous. That means knowing that it is wrong and doing it anyway. That is what is what a mortal sin is, basically. There are only 3 conditions: You have to know that the sin is serious, and that would indicate anything contrary to the 10 Commandments; you have to do it willingly, and you have to do it under no duress, so willingly and with full knowledge and consent. That is exactly what this particular passage in Numbers is outlining for us.

In the Old Testament there was no possible atonement. In the New Testament there is. We can be forgiven through the blood of Christ. That's the big difference. There was no grace in the Old Testament. There is grace now, and the grace is if you sin presumptuously through a mortal sin you have cut yourself off through that sin but you can be restored now, whereas in the Old Testament you couldn't at all. I don't know about you but that is a frightening reality of the Old Testament. I know that God never changes so I am confident that he made allowances in those days for those who truly sought them with their whole heart. I believe that with all that is in me. But as a rule, and the usual way of doing things, it wasn't. We should be very thankful for the grace that comes to us through Christ and his sacrifice. We haven't even gotten very far in but already we can see the principles of confession and atonement and mortal sin. Especially the confession and mortal sin ideas are uniquely Catholic. You don't get that teaching anywhere else. It's interesting that it's all right here if you know the tabernacle.

052118_The Brazen Altar

There is not a whole lot of responsibility required for anybody who believes that he can just go sin and it is fine and what he does doesn't affect anyone else. That absolutely drove me crazy through those church splits that I shared with you because what happened was the people who caused all this destruction in the church stood up one Sunday months later and said "Now we realize that we're wrong and we've asked God to forgive us." I heard that and I wanted to stand up and say "Well, you haven't asked me to forgive you, and you haven't asked the people you did this to to forgive you. What about them? What about us? You have torn this church all to pieces and we are all having to pick up the pieces and figure out what to do next because of you and your presumptuous sin. What about that kind of forgiveness. What about everybody else? It's so convenient for you to be able to stand up and say "I'm so sorry, God has forgiven me." Maybe there is a sense in which that is true. I am not making light of the fact that God's grace covers all our sin. But I am saying, and I am going to continue to reiterate, is that we are a community and what we do affects the people who went before us and the people who will come after us. We're connected. It's not about me and what I want or what is best for me and how I like it. It's not about us. I know we're in this individual mentality right now in our culture, but it's not Biblical.

That bothered me so greatly, and it also brought attention to the fact that I assumed that myself. It was all well and convenient that I didn't have to actually go ask somebody for their forgiveness. We don't have that teaching in the Catholic Church at all. You are expected to make restitution if you can through a penance of some sort, and one of the functions of the priest, and part of the reason that you are required to go to the priest, is that he can forgive on behalf of the whole Church. He has that authority. When you confess the whole Church is, in essence, saying "You are forgiven by all of us who you have harmed too." In a lot of cases you will be asked to offer some sort of restitution or some sort of penance as the scriptures tell us we should. That's if it is possible. There are times that it is not possible and we saw that in that passage in Numbers.

We see in Leviticus 1 that the altar was used for animal sacrifices. The Old Testament is written in Hebrew, and Hebrew is a pictorial language. It makes word pictures because there were not separate words for a lot of ideas. There was no word for cousin in Hebrew, so everyone was called brother. There was no word for famine and so instead they were say in the Old Testament that "the people's teeth were clean for 100 years" and that implied, it showed that picture, that they did not have anything to eat, that there was no food so their teeth were clean. The altar depicts a place of slaughtering. Altars were the sites of sacrificial worship, and we see that sacrifice show up with Cain and Abel. Some sort of sacrificial practice had already been begun there in the earliest parts of Genesis. Genesis 8:20 is one of those areas where Noah exits the ark and the very first thing he does is offer a sacrifice of worship.

They were usually made of earth or stone, but the great altar in the tabernacle was made out of bronze. It was impressive and huge. I am going to read you Leviticus 17 because that is a really important passage for what we are talking about. The chapter heading in my translation is "The Sanctity of Blood." It says in Leviticus 17:11 "For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul. Therefore I said to the children of Israel no one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood." The blood of the thing is what gives it life. Blood was specially set apart for God, because God was the life giver. This has a lot of special connotations for a lot of interesting things.

I am going to flesh this out some later, but I just want to mention that for us ladies this is important because we have a monthly flow of blood and in the Bible - in Leviticus especially, and I remember reading this for the first time and those rules that said that women were unclean during that time and they had to be completely moved over to a whole other part of the camp, isolated, and moved away from people, almost like they had leprosy. I remember reading that and being very offended by it and I said, "Lord, how can that be the case? It's not our fault. You're the one who made us that way!" What I have come to understand now, after many years and whole lot of Bible study and learning, is that God is setting woman apart for himself because she is the life bearer. Because she has that unique ability that God himself only has, that life-bearing ability through the blood that she sheds, she is set apart uniquely for God himself. Isn't that amazing? Blood is holy because there is life in the blood. Blood is the thing that animates an organism, an animal or a human. The blood of the thing is its life. Women are set apart uniquely for God because we have that life-bearing ability that only God has. We share that with him. Notice that when we give birth it is a violent kind of thing and it is bloody. We'll talk about this more later, but it's just important to know that the life of a thing was in its blood and that is why a bloody sacrifice was necessary for worship. In the economy of salvation God said that a life required a life. If one's life is to be spared, something else has to die. Blood is required for atonement, he said.

If you look in Leviticus 1:4 you see that the priest could confess the sin over the animal and the sin was accepted on behalf of that sinner. In Ezekiel 18:4 you see that the soul who sins has to die because the wages of sin are death, as we see in Romans 6:23. Sin causes death. That is exactly what these sacrifices communicated in the Old Testament tabernacle. If you sin, you die. In order to be able to understand that really plainly you have to be able to see the thing die. Otherwise we don't really see the seriousness of our sin, do we? The righteous requirement of the law was without pity. If you look in Deuteronomy 19:21 it says "Your eye shall not pity. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot." I think it's interesting that God allowed animal sacrifices to atone for sin. He was doing two things: He was saving his people, but not eternally. He couldn't do that eternally yet because at this point the animal sacrifices were pointing forward to the ultimate bloody sacrifice on the cross that could and would and does atone for sin eternally. Only Christ can offer a perfect eternal sacrifice because only he is eternal. We can offer for sin but we are not eternal so we can't offer something for our eternal soul. Only he can do that. That is why we do penance. We are not trying to atone for our own sin in an eternal way, we are just trying to make restitution in the ways that we can. The way that we cannot make restitution is eternally. Sin separates us eternally from God, and only God can restore that relationship with him because we disconnect from that eternal life. When we sin, we disconnect our souls from the life source which is God himself -- especially if we sin presumptuously, though any sin causes death. Small sins cause small death, big sins cause the ultimate death, the soul death.

Another idea I want to hammer home here is that all sin is not the same. I grew up hearing that over and over, and I hear it all the time now. It's not true. It's like money. A penny is money but a \$1,000 bill is money too. They are both money but one is worth a penny is one is worth \$1,000. There is a sense in which sin is sin but one sin is not equal to another. If you accidentally sin, for instance, the Old Testament made allowances for those sorts of things. The atonements, or the sacrifices, that were required were not as valuable and didn't cost as much for the offeror as those that would have been very, very serious. Please disabuse yourself of the idea that one sin is just as bad as another, because it's not. I know that Jesus wants us to look at our souls and our motives so he says that if you even have lust in your heart for another person then you are guilty of adultery. So, that is absolutely true. But at the same time, being guilty of adultery in the heart is not as serious as actually committing

052118_The Brazen Altar

adultery. Just with your common sense you know that is true. We know, too, from the scriptures that it is true. I'm just using adultery as an example because it was the first thing that popped into my head. The point is that all sin is not the same. It all does cause some sort of death, but you know as well as I do that having a bad attitude with your husband is not the same as cheating on him.

Obviously the sacrifices were really important. The bronze (or brazen - the two words are interchangeable) was directly inside the entrance to the outer court of the tabernacle. Its position showed that atonement for sin was the very first thing required for admittance to the presence of God and for communion with him. That was the very first thing. As soon as you would walk in that is what you would confront. It was constructed of brass, and brass is a scriptural symbol of judgment. You can see, then, that the judgement of God for sin falls on the altar. The altar's design was also specified in great detail.

In Exodus 27:1-8 you can see the description for this altar. "You shall make the altar of acacia wood, five cubits long and five cubits wide; the altar shall be square, and it shall be three cubits high. You shall make horns for it on its four corners; its horns shall be of one piece with it, and you shall overlay it with bronze. You shall make pots for it to receive its ashes, and shovels and basins and forks and firepans; you shall make all its utensils of bronze. You shall also make for it a grating, a network of bronze; and on the net you shall make four bronze rings at its four corners. You shall set it under the ledge of the altar so that the net shall extend halfway down the altar. You shall make poles for the altar, poles of acacia wood, and overlay them with bronze; the poles shall be put through the rings, so that the poles shall be on the two sides of the altar when it is carried. You shall make it hollow, with boards. They shall be made just as you were shown on the mountain."

The poles and the rings were meant to help transport it when the people packed up the tabernacle and moved with the pillar of cloud and fire. Particularly in verse 2 you can see this kind of interesting specification for this altar, that there are supposed to be horns on the four corners of the altar. Most pictures that I have seen show the horns facing outward but I think that is probably not right. I think that they were probably focused inward so that the points of the horns would have pointed inward toward each other. That is a really cool stipulation. First of all, the horns were supposed to be one piece with the altar. This is cool for a Catholic reason. Although we don't retain those horns on the altar, the word for horn, cornu, is still used to designate the corner of Catholic altars. You have got cornu epistolae and cornu evangeliae, meaning the epistle and the Gospel sides of the altar. How, then, do you think that horns could be relevant to the altar? Why would God specify that the altar be crowned with horns or be one with the horns? If you see the picture online that I posted in the radio notes, that is a weird-looking even distasteful thing. They served a functional role, though, because they helped keep the large carcasses of bulls and other animals in place on the altar as they burned up and fell apart.

More importantly, in the Scriptures horns are symbolic of authority. If you remember, the priests when they were anointed for office were anointed with oil poured from a ram's horn. That denoted that they had a special and unique authority. When we look in Revelation 5:6 we see the heavenly altar through St. John's vision there, and he sees a lamb standing as though it had been slain with seven horns. The lamb has perfect divine authority. Notice also that he is not standing there triumphant and resurrected. He is standing on the altar as a lamb as though he were slain. From the foundation of the earth all the way into the eternity of heaven the lamb is slain. He's bloody and slain. He's alive somehow, but he's on the altar as though he were slain. I love that idea because that is exactly what we commemorate in our mass. He is risen but he is still the lamb and still as though he were slain.

052118_The Brazen Altar

The number seven, we already know, is very symbolic in the Scriptures. It denotes divine perfection. Horns we now know are symbolic of authority and power. St. John saw complete divine authority and power in Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world on the altar on the altar in the heavenly temple.

Let's go to Genesis 2:1-14. This is where Abraham was called to sacrifice Isaac his son and the angel stayed his hand. I wish I had time to go into that because that's a fascinating story. I actually just recorded that story in the filming for "Fearless", so if you get that DVD you'll see that. One of the things that Abraham tells Isaac before he is going to sacrifice him, when Isaac looks around and is like "Hey, we got the wood, we got the knife, we've got the fire, where is the sacrifice?" and Isaac doesn't realize it's going to be him, is that "God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering." After the angel stays Abraham's hand, they look over in a thicket nearby and there is a ram hung in there by its horns. Isn't that amazing? Instead of Abraham being called to sacrifice his only son, God is going to sacrifice his only son. To denote that as early as Abraham, he sent them a ram trapped by its horn in the thicket. There is always a ram in the thicket. Just when you need him, he shows up.

God always provides himself as the sacrifice for the burnt offering. That was a prophesy that Abraham uttered to his son Isaac that looks forward, as all Old Testament sacrifices do, to Christ. They all prefigure him. St. Augustine says that in "Against Heresy." The name of that mountain on which Abraham found that ram hung in a tree by his horns was called Mt. Moriah. If you read through that section in Genesis 2:1-14 you will see that God called Abraham to go to Mt. Moriah. Later, centuries later, according to 2 Chronicles 3:1, Solomon's temple was built on that exact site. There are no coincidences in the scriptures, and I love that. God specified that the brazen altar in that Old Testament tabernacle included horns at each of the four corners to foreshadow that a spiritually authoritative and ultimately completely powerful and efficacious sacrifice was going to be made one day. The power and authority of the brazen altar and the power and authority of Christ by extension, you can see, all comes through sacrifice. The more sacrificial you are the more authoritative and powerful spiritually you are. That is why people like Mother Teresa and John Paul II carried such immense spiritual weight. They offered themselves as sacrifices. I am not talking about some sort of unhealthy martyr complex. I'm talking about a mature faith in God that leaves everything to him and offers everything to him, good or bad. I know you know the difference. The point is that we are always out for spiritual power and authority, and it comes through sacrifice. You can see that through this brazen altar.

St. John saw this heavenly temple, and in doing so what we saw was that in this single moment in time, the moment that is all of eternity, there is a sacrifice of complete and divine authority present on the throne with God in the person of Jesus, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. He was slain from the foundation of the world, as Revelation 13:8 says. That sacrificial altar in the tabernacle, then, was crowned with horns of authority. What kind of authority? It's the authority that only God can make, and it is that of sacrificial love. It is the sacrificial nature of divine love that makes his power so matchless. That is why the Bible says that every knee and every creature will bow to and be conquered by this matchless power of God. This power is concentrated in this sacrifice. That is how we can see how matchless it is. Only a divinity this powerful would stoop so low and be so sacrificial.

In the Old Testament tabernacle the sacrifice of a lamb was required every day, one in the morning and one in the evening. Every day, day by day, there was a sacrificial lamb offered morning and evening. In that same passage in Exodus 29:38-42 where it talks about those offerings, we see also that with those lambs are offered flour and oil, which is bread, and wine. Isn't that amazing? As I was

052118_The Brazen Altar

learning about the Catholic faith and what the mass is and what the Eucharist is, and here we have the sacrificial lamb and the bread and the wine of the mass. I love that. It says, just like all of the pieces of equipment, that it is supposed to last forever there in verse 42. We know that all of these sacrifices and the brazen altar itself was supposed to last forever in some way. We know that because the sacrifices prefigured the sacrifice of Christ which is infinitely effective it was one perfectly authoritative and powerful sacrifice for all time and eternity. Because of that he keeps it perpetual and eternal in his person, and we see that stipulated in Hebrews 10:12-15. Jesus is the door for humanity into the presence of God dwelling with mankind because of the altar of the cross.

I promised you that we would talk about some ways that blood is specially significant in our culture. I don't know why but I've been kicking this around. I've been watching our culture's fascination with things like the Twilight series and the 50 Shades of Grey series, the Walking Dead, the zombies and vampires, and I just look around and go "What is the fascination with this stuff? What is going on with us?" And the video games that are just full of blood and gore and killing. I just have a suggestion. It seems like these things in our culture have developed sort of a cult following. What if this wild fascination with these things stems from this common root, and also even to cutting practices? I don't know if you know about this but there is sort of an epidemic of young girls who cut themselves. They take razor blades and cut their arms and thighs until they bleed. It sounds weird, and you would think it has something to do with this goriness. It really doesn't, and I'm going to connect them in a moment. I just would suggest that these cutting practices, the fascination with vampires and zombies, and the Eucharist all have something in common. I think it all goes back to Leviticus here with these sacrifices and all this blood. We see to be in the grip of bloodthirst, and I really do think that it has something to do with cutting and with Leviticus.

The whole cutting thing came up for me because I know a person who did this herself as a teenager. She participated in this ritual cutting with other people when she was 14 or 15. I was a youth leader at the time, about 20-something, and in a horrified way I was fascinated by it. She shared it with me and all I could think was "What in the world was wrong with you?" She was sharing with me this affinity for cutting because according to her experiences in her circle of friends she said that blood is more intimate than sex because life is in the blood. I thought that was interesting because of two things: First of all, she did not consider that sex is naturally ordered toward life, so life is in sex too unless there is contraception or some other sterile union. Birth, as I mentioned, also involves birth and life as well, even violently so. She was actually surprised that her remark that life was in the blood was actually a direct quote from Leviticus. She said, though, that blood was more intimate than sex because you never share your blood with other people unless you are hurt. She was connecting the pain and the blood together and communion somehow. She said that everybody has sex nowadays and it doesn't mean anything. She said that in sharing blood with somebody else that you are part of that person and their pain, and in the same way they are part of you and there is unity, human-to-human and blood-to-blood. I find it very interesting that she spoke of life and blood and sacrifice in the same context, because it's an echo of that whole Twilight and 50 Shades thing, but also because of all that we have just learned here in Leviticus. If you don't know anything about those two series, both the girls are virgins when they become physically involved with these leading males, and the leading men also draw their blood in other ways. One of them is a vampire and the other is into sadomasochism and bondage and all of that stuff. The men are drawing the blood of these women. These are obviously fictional attempts to somehow use blood to make the relationship even deeper and take it even further. So what if these attempts at personal communion through blood are driven somehow unconsciously by this sort of divine imprint on the soul of these sacrifices? And what if that longing is because this sacred longing was God's idea from the beginning?

052118_The Brazen Altar

We know that a contract is simply a legal agreement but a Biblical covenant, like the covenant of matrimony, is a complete self-donation. It is a sacrificial self-donation. It is an exchange of persons. If you notice, a female usually bleeds in her first sexual encounter. That marriage covenant, in idealist and purest form, is signified in blood by blood, blood spilled in that first act of consummating marital self-donation. Whether she is aware of it or not, her blood is a sign that marks the couple's first intimate encounter as this permanent blood covenant. Through that encounter, and then every one afterward, he transmits the seed of life to her and she potentially carries and nurtures that union into a new life. She sacrificially gives birth to the union in blood and pain. Is that not fascinating?

The Bible is full of these sacrificial blood covenants, and we saw it when we started talking about the Old Testament to begin with. There are seven of them. These blood covenants were God's idea - not because he loves gore and death but because he is holy. Blood is particularly God's and it is reserved for him because he is the one who gives everything its life. If you notice, after Adam and Eve sinned they hid from God under fig leaves in the shame for their nakedness, but didn't God provide clothing from animal skins for them? Maybe he sacrificed the animal and that animal's blood somehow signified from the earliest moment in history God's permanent commitment to humanity, maybe even especially in its sin. Could he, even from this earliest point, have been preparing us for something even deeper? I think he was. We know that blood was holy. We know that because of that it sort of makes blood seem dirty, but in Jewish thought anything holy had connotations to radioactivity, like if you're not holy yourself and you get it on you it can hurt you. We know that women are specially set apart by their monthly flow of blood. All of these Old Testament sacrifices and all of the sacrifices that go along with these covenants seem so brutal because there is so much blood required, but they were meant to illustrate the brutality of sin.

My suggestion is just this: What if God was preparing humanity all the way from back then for the Eucharist, the body and blood of Christ, his body spilled out and poured out for us? He commands us to eat his flesh and drink his blood, so he changes that prohibition where they could not eat blood at all because it would have been unto death to where we must eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6) because there is life in him. When we eat his flesh and drink his blood we will have eternal life, he says in John 6.

Go with God and receive the Eucharist, Dear One!