

“All are justified by the free gift of his grace through **redemption** in Christ Jesus whom God appointed as a **propitiation** through faith in his blood, as a **demonstration** of his righteousness” (this is a literal translation).

This the key passage used by St. Paul to explain how salvation is brought to us by Jesus’ death on the Cross.

Initial reaction to the notion of redemption or ransom, or the appeasement or propitiation of an angry God by a sacrifice, is one of repulsion and such words seem incompatible with a God of Love. Yet, the key is to recognise Paul’s genius in re-expressing these words in the context of a **new** definition of sacrifice. Jesus death **was** a sacrifice but not in OT terms. It was a sacrifice on **his own terms**. The Cross can then be recognised as the inspiring love of God for us. Jesus’ death **re-defined** the meaning of the word sacrifice.

Jesus’ sacrifice is **unique** in three main ways:

First, he was a *willing* victim, it was his free gift to us, “No greater love has any man than to lay down his life for a friend” (Jn.15). He was not offered to God by the people in the way a traditional sacrificial victim was offered. This interpretation is quite impossible. Jesus was not killed as any kind of offering to God and, in any event, human sacrifice was forbidden. He was killed because the Jewish leaders viewed him as a blasphemer and Law breaker.

Second, the offering is really made **by God for us**, not **for God by us**. This is a new type of propitiation: it is not that Jesus died **instead** of us so we can just be free of sin and death, rather **he shares** our death so **we can share** both in his death **and** in his life afterwards with the Father (Jn.3).

Third, the Cross is the public revelation by God that his justice has triumphed, it is a **sign** that God has forgiven us our sins.

Implication for us of the Mass as Sacrifice

In appreciating the sacrificial nature of the Mass we can not help but recognise Jesus’ immeasurable love for us, and understand Jesus’ sacrifice as the perfect model for how we must behave towards one another: “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn.13). This is what the Mass continually teaches us.

The Mass

“Do This In Memory of Me”

Reminding Ourselves of The Mass’ Uniqueness and Beauty

7. The Mass as a Holy Sacrifice



The Mass is the Most Important Part of the Church’s Liturgy

The Liturgy consists of those public acts of worship that unite all Catholics together, all those living everywhere in the world as well as those who have died, the angels, the saints and Our Blessed Lady, in a truly magnificent Communion of Saints and, in turn, this Church of Christ becomes united with the Blessed Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit

In the Mass we are, therefore, in the greatest sense possible on this earth, part of the Mystical Body of Christ

The Paschal events of Jesus’ Last Supper, his Death and Resurrection are re-presented, as if we were actually present at the time of their historical occurrence. That is why the Mass is regarded as being sacrificial.

In the Mass, there is the real presence of Jesus

As we go to receive Holy Communion, we go to receive Our Lord Jesus within us. Therefore, approach him with the humility of love and fear, as if we were walking towards God for our own judgment.

The Mass as a Holy Sacrifice

The Mass first uses the actual word 'sacrifice' at the Preparation of the Gifts, at the start of the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The priest says quietly: "And may *our sacrifice* in your sight this day be pleasing to you, Lord God" before interacting with the congregation to invite them to do likewise: "Pray, brethren, that *my sacrifice and yours* may be acceptable to God, the almighty Father - May the Lord accept *the sacrifice* at your hands".



Sacrifice in the Eucharistic Prayers

The words of Consecration over the wine, Jesus' own words, refer to its sacrificial nature although not employing the word 'sacrifice' itself: "Which will be poured out for you and for many so that sins will be forgiven". This is reminiscent of the distinct feature of the sacrifice made for sin in the Old Testament, which was the sprinkling of the blood of an unblemished offering.

Eucharistic Prayer 1 uses the word 'sacrifice' three times in the context of Jesus' death - before the consecration: "To you, therefore, most merciful Father, we make humble prayer and petition .. that you accept .. *these holy and unblemished sacrifices*", in the commemoration of the living: "For them we offer you this *sacrifice of praise*" and, after the consecration: "Be pleased to look upon these offerings .. *a holy sacrifice*, a spotless victim".

Eucharistic Prayer 3 uses the word 'sacrifice' three times - before the consecration: "*a pure sacrifice* may be offered to your name", and after it: "We offer you in thanksgiving *this holy and living sacrifice*" and: "May *this sacrifice of our reconciliation*, we pray O Lord, advance the peace and salvation of all the world".

Eucharistic Prayer 4 uses the word sacrifice four times, all after the consecration: "We offer you his body and blood, *the sacrifice acceptable* to you which brings salvation to the whole world" and: "Look, O Lord, upon *this sacrifice* which you yourself have provided for your Church" and: "Gathered into one body by the Holy Spirit, they may truly become a *living sacrifice* in Christ" and: "Therefore, Lord, remember now all for whom we offer *this sacrifice*".

How is the Mass a Holy Sacrifice?

The Mass has always been regarded as a Holy Sacrifice: holy principally because Jesus, as the victim, is the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, but holy also because it is an act of God, and holy because it brings us closer to God; and it is a sacrifice because it is a memorial of Jesus' sacrifice "Do this in memory of me", it actually mysteriously re-presents Jesus' death to us, and applies its fruits of grace to those who believe in him.



How is Jesus' Death a Sacrifice?

Jesus' death itself should **not** be understood as a sacrifice in the ordinary sense of that word, nor a sacrifice in Old Testament terms. In the Old Testament, the sin sacrifice could only be made for unintended offences against God, not for deliberate sins, and the offering was made by the people to appease God. Jesus' death redefined the nature of a true sacrifice, and all other kinds of sacrifice are in reality imperfect versions of his.

If Jesus' death was not a 'sacrifice for sin' in O.T. terms in what way was it a sacrifice? There is no emphasis on Jesus' death as a sacrifice in the Gospels, and the Church has never made any dogmatic definition of precisely **how** Jesus' death is a sacrifice. However, we may come to some conclusions by seeing how St. Paul viewed it, and understanding how Jesus was a different kind of offering.

St. Paul only uses the actual word 'sacrifice' twice in the context of Jesus' death (1 Cor.5:7 and Eph. 5:2). This may exemplify the dangers he anticipated in people viewing Jesus' death in traditional sacrificial terms. Instead, he wrestled with a variety of other words to express what he saw as the sacrificial nature of Jesus' death – propitiation, expiation, atonement, reconciliation, redemption/ransom, demonstration.

Atonement and reconciliation really refer to the outcome, namely our new relationship with God. Arguably, the three principal ideas used by St. Paul to explain the process are redemption/ransom, propitiation, and display or demonstration. They are all used within a short passage in Romans: 3:24-25: