

Dear Friends of Christ, one of the most important practices found in the Judaic faith involved the sacrificial rituals that God required His people to offer Him. The sacrifice consisted of a priest publicly offering or transferring to God a visible gift or victim, which signified God's supreme and fatherly dominion over them. The sacrifices originally took place within the precincts of the Tabernacle. Eventually they occurred within the great Temple that King Solomon completed around 970 B.C. An animal was required to be slain as a sin and peace offering. This was done because the ancients believed that blood was the seat of life; consequently, the offering of blood became equated with an offering of the life of the animal, and the life of the animal eventually became a symbol for the soul.

The Jewish people greatly esteemed three kinds of sacrifices: 1) The Sacrifice of the Covenant – the covenant which Moses established between God and His people by sprinkling the blood of the slain animal on both the altar and the people with the words, "Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you" (cf. Exodus 24); 2) The Pasch (literally, "a passing by"), or Passover – the most solemn of Jewish festivals which commemorated Israel's deliverance from the bondage of Egypt and the preservations of the first-born of the Hebrews (cf. Exodus 12); 3) The Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) – a day instituted for the expiation of all the sins and irreverence committed by the people during the course of the preceding year.

What is the relationship of these ancient Jewish rituals with regards to our Faith? As Catholics, we believe that Christ fulfilled these ancient Jewish rituals in His own Person. Jesus established a new covenant between God and His Church when He said to His apostles at the Last Supper, "This cup...is the new covenant in my Blood (Lk 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Jesus is the new Pasch, "The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn 1:29). We can say that the punishment and wrath of God passes over us when we are bathed in the Blood of Christ. Finally, St. Paul speaks of Jesus Christ as being made "a sacrifice of propitiation" (Rom 3:25), with the Death of Christ whose precious blood and sacrifice are efficacious once and for all (cf. Letters to the Hebrews). Unlike the Day of Atonement that removes only the sins of the past year, Jesus' sacrifice is eternal. In His sacrifice of Calvary, Jesus fulfills all these Old Testament sacrifices and obtains for us all the graces necessary for our salvation. It is this sacrifice that is re-presented every time we partake in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Pax Christi, Fr. Thomas