

# ***Ten minutes a day through Lent***

A reading from *Hebrews*  
a short reflection  
ideas how to pray  
for each day

**Fifth week  
23-28 March**

**Monday 23 March**

**Eternal access to the Living God**

**Hebrews 9:1-14**

*Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly sanctuary. For a tent was constructed, the first one, in which were the lampstand, the table, and the bread of the Presence; this is called the Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a tent called the Holy of Holies. In it stood the golden altar of incense and the ark of the covenant overlaid on all sides with gold, in which there were a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tablets of the covenant; above it were the cherubim of glory overshadowing the mercy seat. Of these things we cannot speak now in detail.*

*Such preparations having been made, the priests go continually into the first tent to carry out their ritual duties; but only the high priest goes into the second, and he but once a year, and not without taking the blood that he offers for himself and for the sins committed unintentionally by the people. By this the Holy Spirit indicates that the way into the sanctuary has not yet been disclosed as long as the first tent is still standing. This is a symbol of the present time, during which gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper, but deal only with food and drink and various baptisms, regulations for the body imposed until the time comes to set things right.*

*But when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!*

**Comment** Having described the Sinai covenant as “obsolete”, *Hebrews* turns to the worship of the Tabernacle during Israel’s wilderness wanderings. Seen as an earthly model of heavenly reality, it consisted of inner and outer tents, the passage from one to the other closed off by a curtain. While the people remained outside, the priests entered the outer area to conduct worship. Only the high priest, once a year, was allowed to enter the inner tent, the Holy of Holies. Even then, he had to sprinkle sacrificial blood in atonement for sins. So the people were remote from God’s presence – until Jesus entered the full heavenly presence of God, by virtue of his own blood, offered on the cross. This was no annual, earthly imitation, but a once-for-all eternal removal of the barrier.

Where a troubled conscience formerly distanced us from God, we now have direct access to Him through Jesus. We are redeemed.

**Tuesday 24 March**

**The mediator of the new covenant**

**Hebrews 9:15-end**

*For this reason he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, because a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions under the first covenant. Where a will is involved, the death of the one who made it must be established. For a will takes effect only at death, since it is not in force as long as the one who made it is alive. Hence not even the first covenant was inaugurated without blood. For when every commandment had been told to all the people by Moses in accordance with the law, he took the blood of calves and goats, with water and scarlet wool and hyssop, and sprinkled both the scroll itself and all the people, saying, "This is the blood of the covenant that God has ordained for you." And in the same way he sprinkled with the blood both the tent and all the vessels used in worship. Indeed, under the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.*

*Thus it was necessary for the sketches of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves need better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made by human hands, a mere copy of the true one, but he entered into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf. Nor was it to offer himself again and again, as the high priest enters the Holy Place year after year with blood that is not his own; for then he would have had to suffer again and again since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to remove sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for mortals to die once, and after that the judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.*

**Comment** These verses use two pictures. One is that of a will: we only inherit when the testator dies. The other, more challenging, concerns blood. We can grasp the idea of blood being associated with “covenant”. When we say that a covenant is “sealed with our blood”, we mean that we will stake our life on it, commit everything to maintaining it. The blood of a sacrificed animal signified one level. But the blood here signifies the entire commitment to the new covenant of God in his Son, and of

humanity in the man Jesus. The total seriousness of that commitment is confirmed in Jesus' death on the cross, which underlines the immutability of the commitments made. It is what removes the obstacle between us and God, what guarantees the forgiveness of our sins.

After death, the judgement. God's verdict on Jesus? Vindicated! So we can enter into our inheritance as beneficiaries of his will.

### **Wednesday 25 March**

#### **The source of our eternal salvation**

#### **Hebrews 10:1-18**

*Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come and not the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered year after year, make perfect those who approach. Otherwise, would they not have ceased being offered, since the worshipers, cleansed once for all, would no longer have any consciousness of sin? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sin year after year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body you have prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, 'See, God, I have come to do your will, O God' (in the scroll of the book it is written of me)." When he said above, "You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings" (these are offered according to the law), then he added, "See, I have come to do your will." He abolishes the first in order to establish the second. And it is by God's will that we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.*

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

**Comment** As in any good sermon, *Hebrews* repeats and re-enforces its main points. Having just developed the way in which Jesus is our designated high priest and then explored the sacrificial aspects of his

work for us, he now turns again to Jesus as the source of our eternal salvation. It was in the nature of the sacrificial system of the Sinai covenant that the rituals and sacrifices were continuously running behind events, trying to keep up with the barriers that kept us from God, worse, constantly reminding us of those barriers and encouraging us to desperately try to attain an adequate level.

But Jesus, by his once-for-all offering of himself, achieves our full sanctification. That done, in the words of the psalm, he sits down. Nothing more is to be done.

Not just that, but the Holy Spirit works in God's people to write his ways into our hearts and minds. God having put away all remembrance of our failings in his total forgiveness, no further sacrifices are required.

## Thursday 26 March

### Christ gives us confidence to approach God

#### *Hebrews 10:19-25*

*Therefore, my friends, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let 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. Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

**Comment** Now *Hebrews* turns to exhortation. For Christ has opened for us a way through the curtain; we have free access to go where it was formerly impossible: into the very presence of God.

What then must we do? Why, trusting in our high priest, let us seize the opportunity. Let us enter confidently into that relationship with God which he has won for us. Our hope is to enjoy that relationship. We can trust God. Who would suggest that he could be unfaithful?

There are powerful metaphors here: we are sprinkled clean, washed... We are to provoke one another – to love and to good deeds.

We are not to neglect meeting. How are we to apply that in days of lockdown? Indeed, for many the Day, the time of encountering God has seemed far off, something that we could safely put out of our minds. But perhaps it is closer than we think. Let's encourage one another.

Friday 27 March

**Do not reject this gracious salvation**

**Hebrews 10:26-end**

*For if we willfully persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries. Anyone who has violated the law of Moses dies without mercy "on the testimony of two or three witnesses." How much worse punishment do you think will be deserved by those who have spurned the Son of God, profaned the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know the one who said, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay." And again, "The Lord will judge his people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

*But recall those earlier days when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to abuse and persecution, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting. Do not, therefore, abandon that confidence of yours; it brings a great reward. For you need endurance, so that when you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet "in a very little while, the one who is coming will come and will not delay; but my righteous one will live by faith. My soul takes no pleasure in anyone who shrinks back." But we are not among those who shrink back and so are lost, but among those who have faith and so are saved.*

**Comment** This passage speaks of judgement and of the consequences of rejecting the redemption won for us by Christ. Violation of the law under the old covenant was punished by death. What then for those who reject God's grace?

Eternal fire tends to take a back seat in our contemporary theology. Yet maybe we should ask ourselves what our situation would be if we became so entirely in thrall to our own desires and ambitions that we were to consciously repudiate God's grace in order to cling to them. Such a situation would not be an act of a vengeful God, but of our own choice. When *Hebrews* says that situation is fearful to contemplate, *Hebrews* is surely right.

How much better the situation of those who have embraced God's redemption, even enduring pain and hardship for the hope of what is promised them. They embrace salvation in faith "and so are saved".

**Saturday 28 March**

**Faith, the underpinning of our hope**

**Hebrews 11:1-16**

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. Indeed, by faith our ancestors received approval. By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that are not visible.*

*By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain's. Through this he received approval as righteous, God himself giving approval to his gifts; he died, but through his faith he still speaks. By faith Enoch was taken so that he did not experience death; and "he was not found, because God had taken him." For it was attested before he was taken away that "he had pleased God." And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him. By faith Noah, warned by God about events as yet unseen, respected the warning and built an ark to save his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir to the righteousness that is in accordance with faith.*

*By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised, as in a foreign land, living in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old-- and Sarah herself was barren-- because he considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, "as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore."*

*All of these died in faith without having received the promises, but from a distance they saw and greeted them. They confessed that they were strangers and foreigners on the earth, for people who speak in this way make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of the land that they had left behind, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them.*

**Comment** Hebrews now turns to its third great theme: faith. Faith is neither an emotion nor a response to absolute certainty. It is a decision, all things considered, to go with one line of action rather than another. Marriage, taking a job, any significant decision, is a decision of faith. The

faith discussed here is the decision to respond to God, specifically as seen in Jesus Christ, to become his follower, to commit to his way and to obey him. How God has affirmed men and women of faith is the theme of these justly famous verses, to which we will return next week.

### One Prayer

Pick up one thought from the reading and bring it before God as a short prayer.

It need not be complicated. God understands what we try to say to him.

### One Thought

Think about the issues raised by the reading. What could it mean for me? Is this the way the world is, or the way the world might be? Carry the thought with you through the day and try to remember it before you go to sleep.

### One Thank-you

Find something in the reading that you can thank God for. Try to be explicit, however little it may seem. Then thank God for it, just as you would thank someone who gave you a gift.

### Sum it up

*Merciful Lord,  
absolve your people from their  
offences,  
that through your bountiful  
goodness  
we may all be delivered from the  
chains of those sins  
which by your frailty we have  
committed;  
grant this, heavenly Father,  
for Jesus Christ's sake, our  
blessed Lord and Saviour,  
who is alive and reigns with you,  
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, now and for ever .*

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name;  
your kingdom come;  
your will be done  
on earth, as it is in heaven.*

*Give us today our daily bread.*

*Forgive us our sins,  
as we forgive those who sin  
against us.*

*Lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.*

*For yours is the kingdom and the  
power and the glory forever.*

DMW