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## FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD

Whenever I hear, or am privileged once again as a priest to say, these words, peace rushes into my soul. Jesus gave himself for the whole world. This one fact renders the peace that passes understanding.

Cranmer's prayer of consecration frames this fact of Jesus in these familiar words, "All glory be to thee, Almighty God, our heavenly Father, for that thou, of thy tender mercy, didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption; who made there by his one oblation of himself once offered, a full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world."

We must take care to understand these most precious words. What is the one oblation of Jesus? Most of us would answer it is his sacrifice on Calvary. But that would be only partly right.

The one oblation of Jesus is the entirety of his life. By the time he comes to the moment of the cross, he has lived as a man perfectly. It is because of this reality he is that he offers his life there with all its inherent value and power - all at once. His life is full, lacking nothing. He is perfect in intention. His sacrifice is sufficient to cover the sins of all men throughout space and time. And so Jesus pours out himself to God the Father, and satisfies the divine justice and mercy.

Can we ever fully grasp the meaning of Jesus? I do not think so. We can only be grateful that, as one of us, he has lived a blameless human existence. And in saying so, we must always set squarely before our mind's eye that he did so as a human being.

Somehow we often forget this. Jesus Christ was and is a man, and while we profess that he is also God the Son, in whose person is the union of human and divine natures, a reality beyond our capacity to understand fully, he is not a man in any sense, in any way, at any time, that precludes his solidarity of being with you and me.

Jesus differs from us only in this that his will, all his loves, were set in order toward his Father. But they were and are and must be human loves, entirely human, with the same being and meaning as those we possess, and with which we err. Jesus differs from us in that he did not err. His devotion to his Father was singular and pure.

Remember the healing of the paralytic. When Jesus declares that his

sins are forgiven, the scribes claim that he blasphemes, because only God can forgive sins. And then Jesus, knowing their thoughts, asks them a question. Which is easier: to forgive a man his sins or to heal him?

We might reply that we can forgive one another and that we cannot heal as Jesus could heal, simply by his word. From our point of view it may seem easier to forgive than to heal. But this would be to miss the depth of what Jesus does and what he means.

We might forgive one another insofar as we are able. But in the words of the psalmist, "no man may deliver his brother, nor give a ransom unto God for him, for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone forever" (Psalm 49:7,8; p.400, Book of Common Prayer). The forgiveness of Jesus is what reconciles man not only to man but also and primarily to God.

From his point of view this is not easier. To heal is for Jesus to call upon the resources of his divine nature, to restore molecules and bodily tissue, which for the creator of the world, whose power is infinite, is not hard. But to forgive sins as the Son of Man is not a matter of divine power but of human love. This requires obedience and long-suffering over an entire lifetime. The offering that Jesus makes on Calvary is not confined to the moment of death, but reaches back to his beginning in this world when he first refused the evil and chose the good. It was the entirety of his life, lived as a man in devotion to God, through temptation and calumny and misunderstanding and envy and hatred, perfected through sufferings as the author of Hebrews reckons, all without sin, that would make it possible for him to forgive and to bring us to God.

When Jesus healed the paralytic he did so with the demonstration that he had been given authority to forgive sins. It was the privilege and calling of the Son of Man to do so. He was not only the representative man, man qua man, man in his quintessence, but he was the Son of Man who knew his end in the one oblation of the cross. That moment would take up all his life long, and poured out to God, would reconcile the world to him.

"...for the sins of the whole world." Peace rushes into my heart each time I say, or hear, these words of Cranmer's prayer of consecration. And it does not stop there. Jesus gives us his body to eat and his blood to drink in a spiritual taking of the inherent power and value of his own human life.

And as we present these gifts of his own making to the Father, we remember the entirety of his life, his passion and death, his mighty resurrection and glorious ascension. The satisfaction that Jesus has poured out in his life lived perfectly toward God is taken up and formed into the salvation of man. His is the resurrection of the body and the location of that resurrected body in the ascended life of heaven. Jesus as a man gave himself for the whole world and in doing so made a way for the world to return to God.

In the prayer of thanksgiving, at the end of the service of Holy Communion, we give thanks to God that we are "very members incorporate in the mystical body of his Son." Through the oblation of Jesus in the entirety of his life once offered, and now through the

Sacrament of his body and blood, which keeps us and nourishes us in him, the peace of God that passes understanding reigns in our hearts. More than anything else it is his peace that settles us. We have been assured of his favor and goodness. And so we rest in the knowledge of his offering and through participation in the Blessed Sacrament. We are saved, we ourselves, in the fact of our humanity, because Jesus was and is man. He shares our humanity that we might partake of him, Son of Man and Son of God, that we, as men, may become the adopted children of his Father. Nothing is more wonderful than this. Our cup of peace runneth over.

**The Rev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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