

## Heb 10:11-14;19-25

11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 and since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool. 14 For by one sacrifice he has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on towards love and good deeds, 25 not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

## John 15:9-17

9 'As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 17 This is my command: love each other.'

## Remembrance: sacrifice

### Hebrews 10:11-14;19-25

How much a part of love is sacrifice? How much of our own comfort do we give up for the benefit of others? This is a national and a political question as well as a personal one. How much of our lives are lived in accordance with our own interests as opposed to the interests of others?

On Remembrance Sunday this is something which brings our faith into sharp relief in the context of remembering those who have given their lives in times of war. As we remember those known to us who were lost, we have to also think about how God himself made the ultimate sacrifice for us in the person of Jesus.

The Hebrews passage addresses the dramatic change brought about by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus in the way sacrifice was understood by the Jews of his time. 11 Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. The writer of Hebrews states categorically that this system of blood sacrifices was rendered completely unnecessary by Jesus.

In verse 14 he says: *For by one sacrifice Jesus has made perfect for ever those who are being made holy.* The fact that they have to keep doing it is proof it doesn't work. By his death Jesus made it unnecessary. It's interesting that only around 40 years after Jesus' resurrection, the sacrificial system came to an end, although to this day the Jewish faith has never recognised Jesus as the Messiah

Jesus laid down his earthly life for what christians believe is *all* people, but we can also understand sacrifice in a wider sense. A dictionary definition to put alongside the New Testament understanding is this: 'The act of giving up something highly valued for the sake of something or someone else considered to have a greater value or claim'

And sacrifice is what we acknowledge today; that no one who goes to war can ever be sure that they will return, but they still go – willingly accepting that fact. This is maybe the closest we can come to knowing how Jesus felt in the days and hours leading up to his crucifixion. The difference of course is that the scale of what Jesus gave up is beyond our understanding. He lived a normal human life with a loving family until the age of 30, a significant fact which we tend to gloss over. At the same time, he was fully God, and so his sense of despair as he died was intense: *My God my God why have you forsaken me?*

In the same way that all of us can consider ourselves free to live our lives in peace, thanks to the sacrifice of others in war, so in the spiritual sense, we can also be confident in our relationship with God because of Jesus' victory over death. v22 *let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings.* The writer makes it clear that the priests could never achieve the aim of their sacrifices. And we are unable to achieve our own salvation. Nothing we do will ever be good enough. It's enough that we believe in Him because that is all that's necessary.

But the model Jesus gives us despite this is for our lives to be lived sacrificially. In other words with thought for others being put before thought for ourselves. That way is true peace of mind and freedom.

The film of Ian Mckewan's book *Atonement* which I watched the other day has always resonated with me as a story which describes our struggle to find God, forgiveness and ultimately peace of mind. It's set just before the war and the central character Robbie is falsely accused of a rape by his lover Cecelia's jealous younger sister Briony. The innocent Robbie has to atone for the crime he never even committed by going to prison, and then is let out on condition he signs up to fight. Briony subsequently spends all her life trying and failing to atone for her malicious lies. There's also an absolutely breathtaking 5 minute scene, filmed in a single tracking shot, depicting the soldiers waiting for rescue on the beach at Dunkirk, which brings home the devastating reality of war, and the damage it does to all of us, not least those who come home, and the families of those who don't. And so we can recognise firstly the bad news: we cannot atone for our own sins however good we think we are, but also the good news that because of the sacrifice of Jesus we realise that as long as our faith is in him we don't need to.

**John 15: 12 My command is this: love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command.**