

Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 21, 2024
Year of the Most Holy Eucharist
Reflection #17

*“The phrase **worship experience** missed the point. Worship, in the ancient tradition, was not thought of as an experience at all; it was an act. . . . They had come to **do** something, not to get something.” (Thomas Howard, *Evangelical is not Enough*, p.45)*

If you recall, we last spoke of the establishment of the Tent of Meeting and the Sanctuary. With the construction of these religious structures, the children of God possess a visible and tangible reminder of His presence within their midst. However, this is only half of Divine worship. The children of Israel need a sacred place to encounter God. They/we will also require a proper way to worship. Religion is this proper way.

Too often we hear others exclaim one of the following statements: “I am spiritual, but I am not religious” or “I do not need organized religion.” It appears there are some who no longer understand what the word religion means. Religion is an ACT of worship directed toward God. A person, guided by edicts given in the book of Leviticus, went to the Tent of Meeting to perform an action directed toward the worship of God. Most often, this action consisted of offering a sacrifice to God, a sacrifice of praise. I offer (_____) to praise God for (____). This act of worship, religion, was not dependent upon one’s relationship with the minister. Nor did one arrive at the Tent of Meeting anticipating a vibrant atmosphere or a dynamic instruction. Lastly, once one arrived, the act of worship, religion, was neither chaotic nor spontaneous. In the Book of Leviticus, God gradually reveals to His children, and us as well, that religion, the act of right, proper and dignified worship of Him, consists in giving something to Him rather than expecting a return.

We may wonder as to “Why” God establishes religion as an act of worship? Furthermore, we may wonder “Why” God is very detailed or specific with His directives concerning how He desires worship to take place? He regulates which items are to be used in the various sacrifices. He also mandates the dispositions required of the ones who have come to offer sacrifice to Him. Nowhere, in this wilderness wandering, do we read the children of Israel responding to these commands with: “He should just be happy that I am here.” Unlike many in our time, they understood the seriousness involved with religion, worshiping God. Please do not fall victim to this “modern” line of thought. With these sacrificial requirements established, God teaches how outward gestures and appearance can affect interior dispositions. And, vice versa, interior dispositions affect outward gestures and appearances. I leave you with this to consider — If God is this specific/demanding concerning the sacrifices of animals or plants to His praise, then what, do you suppose, is His expectation concerning the supreme sacrifice, the sacrifice of His own beloved Son (our Eucharist)?