

²⁰ Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." ²² Philip went and told Andrew, then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. ²³ Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain, but if it dies it bears much fruit. ²⁵ Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

²⁷ "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say: 'Father, save me from this hour'? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again." ²⁹ The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." ³⁰ Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. ³¹ Now is the judgment of this world; now the

ruler of this world will be driven out. ³² And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people^[a] to myself.” ³³ He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

Holy Wisdom, Holy Word.

In World War II, Lieutenant John Robert Fox was serving in Italy, fighting the Germans, around Christmas 1944. US forces had retreated from the Italian town of Sommocolonia but Fox and a crew stayed behind to be spotters for US artillery fire to try and hamper the enemy advance.

The Germans eventually overran the town. As the enemy forces overtook his position, Fox told his soldiers to retreat and ordered an artillery strike on his position. He repeated the

coordinates because the artillery personnel knew the strike would be right on him. Fox

eventually said, “Fire It! There’s more of them than there are of us.” Fox was killed in the

barrage, it is unknown if he was killed by enemy fire or the artillery barrage. His body was

recovered a week later after the US regained the town. His actions allowed people from the

town to escape, delayed the German offensive and killed a large number of enemy forces. For

his sacrifice, Fox was awarded the congressional medal of honor.¹

Fox sacrificed his life for a cause and a mission bigger than himself.

When we think of sacrifice, we think of Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus lived his

own commandment that he gave to his disciples. Jesus says in John 15:12-13 -¹² “This is my

commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.¹³ No one has greater love than

this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” Jesus laid down his life for his friends, and for so

much more.

¹ [“I Did Not Send For You” – John Fox and the Medal of Honor - National Medal of Honor Museum \(mohmuseum.org\)](http://mohmuseum.org)

In our gospel reading today, we read about the public ministry of Jesus winding down. Jesus warns the crowd that the time is coming soon for the end, for when he will be glorified. We know he will be glorified through the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.

Jesus shares a last little parable with his disciples. He's signaling that with his expected death, the seed of that death will bear much fruit. We know that more than 2,000 years later that his death still bears much fruit. Each day people are introduced to the great power and love that the Lord Jesus Christ showed in his life and death, and their lives are changed forever.

Jesus shows his humanity again in this gospel passage, when he admits he is troubled at the prospect of what is ahead. He says his soul is troubled. But he is obedient. He knows his life on earth is coming to its culmination.

He could run. He could live his life on the run when he realizes the religious and political forces want him gone. But he doesn't. He decides to face the music, come what may. He knows that this is what he is supposed to do.

One of the big problems of the early Christians was explaining to people why their Messiah died. Their savior was killed. It isn't a great selling point to folks, is it? Your king gets executed by the tormenters of your people? One of the ways they tried to make sense of it was to go back into their religious practice and the importance of sacrifice in the Jewish religion back in ancient times.

Much of the language surrounding the cross is of sacrifice. Jews of the first century knew the language of sacrifice because they had the laws and customs of sacrifice. They sacrificed animals to make peace with God. Rowan Williams in his book *The Sign and the Sacrifice: The Meaning of the Cross and Resurrection*, writes that sacrifices of animals were done to make peace with God and do away with guilt. He points out that in Leviticus there is the dramatic

ritual of the Day of Atonement, where the sins of all the people are laid on the head of a goat who is then driven out into the wilderness. This goat is the scapegoat. (p. 23).

Williams also points to Leviticus 17.11 where “the blood of a sacrificed animal ‘covers over’ sin or guilt, because ‘the life of a creature is in the blood’ and ‘It is the blood that makes atonement for one’s life’.” (p. 23). Sacrifice makes things right with God again and “brings him back into an active relationship with the world.” (p. 25). This is how the Jews understood the mechanics of making their lives right with God. Through sacrifice.

Williams writes that the early Christians “speak of the death of Jesus as a sacrifice because it’s a rescue operation. Its purpose is to turn aside terror and catastrophe, pain, suffering, punishment. It breaks the chain between evil actions and evil consequences.” (p. 27).

Williams later writes that “Jesus’ sacrifice is the sacrifice of obedience. At every moment of his life he has given his heart to God in such a way that God is able to work through him with no interruption, with no diversion.” (p. 31).

Jesus himself used the Lord’s Supper, which we celebrate today, to show people what his death would mean. In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus uses the concept of sacrifice to make meaning of what was about to happen and to explain it to his disciples.

Scholar and prolific writer N.T. Wright explains it this way, “When Jesus wanted to explain to his followers what his forthcoming death would mean, he didn’t give them a theory, he gave them a meal. The Last Supper, with all its sacrificial overtones...was Jesus’ own final and definitive interpretation of the meaning of his death.” N.T. Wright. 29-30

Jesus tells his disciples when he breaks the bread at the Last Supper, take and eat this bread, for this is my body, broken for you. Drink from this cup, the cup of the new covenant, sealed in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. When you drink from it, do this in remembrance of me.

Scholar James Dunn writes that Jesus spoke of his pending death as a sacrifice and not a sin offering. It harkens to what it is written in Exodus, that "Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people and said, see the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you." Jesus may well have gone more willingly to his death because he saw it as the sacrifice which would bring into effect that long-promised covenant." 817

While personally agonizing for him, he knew his sacrifice would lead to a glorious thing. Dunn writes that "Jesus surely did not see his death as defeat and disaster; would he have set his face to go to Jerusalem so resolutely in that case?" Much more likely, he saw his expected

death as a prelude to the consummation of God's purpose, the birth-pangs of the age to come, perhaps even the means by which the kingdom would come." 820

In reading the scriptures in Lent and during Holy Week, it is a great reminder to us to remember to read the texts through the eyes of someone in the first century. What was important to Jews in that time period? Sacrifice was important. People would go to the temple and offer sacrifices to the Lord there. As we see already in scripture, sacrifice was critical to the people of Israel throughout their history, including in the time of Jesus. In our day and age, we would not dream of offering a sacrifice of an animal to gain favor with God. That practice is long gone. But in Jesus' time, it was not. To the early Christians, the idea of Jesus' dying on the cross as a sacrifice made perfect sense.

And if Jesus thought of his death as the prelude to the consummation of God's purpose as

Dunn says, then that consummation is the resurrection of the Lord on the third day. The grace

of the sacrifice for all of us is the resurrection of Jesus, the new life in Christ.

Not only is the cross a symbol of sacrifice, it is also a symbol of love. In our reading today in

John, the death of Jesus is a 'glorification.' Rowan Williams writes that the cross is a sign of

love when Jesus in Luke says, Father forgive them; and in Peter's letter, we are reminded that

Jesus doesn't retaliate against his torturers. "Here is a divine love that cannot be defeated by

violence: we do our worst, and we still fail to put God off." (p. 8).

Williams writes that "Jesus was free from the vicious circle of retaliation, and so can we be and

so should we be. Christ did not retaliate, return abuse for abuse; so neither should we."

Stephen, the first martyr, in Acts of the Apostles models the end of his life after Jesus.

Stephen, as he is facing execution for his faith in Christ, prays to Jesus 'Do not hold this sin

against them' (Acts 7.60). (pp. 9-10). This sign of forgiveness and love, the one that Jesus displayed on the cross, and Stephen displayed in his final minutes, is a model for us to forgive and love all people when people do harm to us.

The cross is a sign of sacrifice and love. The cross is a sign of glory for God. The cross teaches us that we must sacrifice sometimes. Parents sacrifice all the time for the good of their children. Lieutenant Fox sacrificed his life for something greater than himself. Jesus sacrificed his life for us, to display for us the importance of sacrificing ourselves and the power of forgiveness and love.

"Father, glorify your name," the scripture says. Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again."

Amen.