

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost, Epistle, Year A

CHRIST'S SACRIFICE

Romans 12:1-8

Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Analysis by Michael Hoy

1I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another. 6We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness.

DIAGNOSIS: Unacceptable Sacrifice

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem): Conforming to This World

People make sacrifices all the time. This world encourages the sacrifice toward “success,” which is defined more commonly as bettering oneself, making it to the top, claiming superiority. It is more commonly seen in this world as the effort to achieve

personal power, prosperity, prestige—but not Pentecost.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem): Blinded by Arrogance

So, held by the vision of this world, we become blinded by it. We assume that this world's vision of "success" is in fact the goal of our own lives and, in our arrogance, we lift up all the ways in which we have achieved power, prosperity, and prestige; or we make them our life's ambition. Indeed, we vaunt our own superiority over others to the point of missing out on the depth of what all we have sacrificed along the way, including our very souls.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem): Sober-ing Judgment

Like those who drank in the wines of this world's gods to the point of drunkenness, we are eventually led to a more sobering judgment. All that we have measured as good and perfect and successful comes to naught. God holds us accountable and finds our sacrifice unholy, empty, littered by the ruined others (including the creation) whom we have trampled on our way to our vaunted illusions. Instead of success, we have only achieved defeat and failure.

PROGNOSIS: Acceptable Sacrifice

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution): Christ's Sacrifice

Who picks us up precisely at our depth of defeat and failure? It is the sacrifice of God's Son, Jesus the Christ, on the cross. Sharing in the depth of all that is broken and without hope, he makes our death his own. He does not place himself above others in vaunted superiority, but takes his place in the ruins of our lives, thereby claiming us before God as his own.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution): Discerning the Will of God

That leads us to a different vision of success. Success is not

something we earn. Success is a gift given to us through Christ. We are God's children, "brothers and sisters" of one another, treasuring what is "good and acceptable and perfect" through the lens of Christ's cross. We trust, we discern, that God's will is not to judge the world in darkness, but to save the world "by the mercies of God" in Christ Jesus.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution): Living Sacrifice

Similarly, success is not measured by our own attempts to gain over others, but to gain for others—even to gain the brother or sister. It is to succeed in the larger vision of Paul's Spirited-vision here how it is that we all work together for God's good—in ministering, teaching, exhorting, being generous, diligent, compassionate, cheerful. Our collective body, as the body of Christ, but also our very bodies become instruments of a living sacrifice giving ourselves away for the good of all.