

# Fr. Tom's Celestial Musings

## The Year of the Priesthood

### Part 2: Priest-Victims<sup>1</sup>

In our culture today, victimhood is talked about a lot. Usually, the word “victim” is used to describe a person to whom a particular injustice has been done. Additionally, the word is sometimes used to excuse a person’s anger or hatred toward an individual or a group of people. Thanks to the dozens of popular talk shows on television today, victimhood is sometimes distorted and used so loosely that it loses its meaning and becomes a hollow shell that beckons for attention and retribution. Thousands of years ago, however, the word victim had a much different meaning and significance.

In ancient Judaism there were many victim offerings. Various livestock, the choicest of the herds, would be slaughtered as victim-offerings, or gifts, to God. Eventually, the Israelites began to realize that God desired much more from them than slaughtered animals. We read about their important growing awareness in Psalm 50, in which God says—

I need no bullock from your house, no goats from your fold.  
For every animal of the forest is mine, beasts by the thousands on my mountains.  
I know every bird of the heavens; the creatures of the field belong to me.  
Were I hungry, I would not tell you, for mine is the world and all that fills it.  
Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats?  
Offer praise as your sacrifice to God; fulfill your vows to the Most High.  
-Psalm 50:9-14

Through this beautiful passage and others like it, we begin to see how God desires for each of us to be an offering to Him. In God’s Son, Jesus Christ, we begin to understand even more clearly how we are called to be a victim for God. In the letter to the Hebrews we read that Jesus Christ is the eternal High Priest as well as the perfect, eternal Sacrifice and Victim. In chapter nine we read, “When Christ became the high priest... he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own blood” (Hebrews 9:11a, 12). In as much as each of us shares in Christ’s priesthood, we too are called to share in His victimhood.

Ordained priests share in Christ’s identity in a very particular and intimate way. This means that priests share in Christ’s victimhood in a very particular and intimate way. We are called to not only regularly offer the eternal sacrifice of the Mass for God’s people, but to offer our very lives for them in concrete ways each day. Some of the specific ways that priests can experience victimhood in their union with Christ is through obedience, celibacy, physical exhaustion, mentally and spiritually carrying the prayer petitions of others (i.e. intercession), accepting the scarcity of personal time, and gently receiving people’s verbal abuse, judgments and rebukes.

Sacramental priesthood offers a very unique experience of being a victim with Christ. Yet, each authentic vocation offers the opportunity in various ways. Saint Augustine expressed this beautifully when he wrote that there is no need to look outside oneself for a sheep to offer to God. Each has within him that which he can crucify.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In honor of the “Year of the Priesthood,” announced by Pope Benedict, this is part 2/12 in a series on the priesthood

<sup>2</sup> Fulton J. Sheen, The Priest is Not His Own, Ignatius Press, 2005, pg. 25