

This past week I was able to spend some days in Mexico City, and among the things I was able to do was to concelebrate a Mass at *the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe*. My brother priest, Father Jerry Burns, reminded me that we should walk through the ceremonial doors at the basilica's entrance, in this jubilee year, Pilgrims of Hope Jubilee Year, declared by Pope Francis, has recently begun.

*But what is a jubilee year?* It goes back to biblical times. As we know, God created in six days and rested on the 7th. Mirroring this cycle of seven we see in the book of Leviticus 25, that there was a Sabbath year every seven years. But even more, in that same chapter, we hear God's desire for his people to have a jubilee year. At the end of seven cycles of seven years, would come a 50th year that was to be a jubilee for God's people. The verses give specifics of what God commands people to do in that year, but it boils down to that they were to reset in any way they had gotten off course: debts forgiven, indentured servants set free, properties and material goods were given back to the rightful owner. In other words, everything God intended his sons and daughters to have would be restored to them.

There's a connection to what we celebrate on this feast today. In another part of the books of Moses, God says, "*Consecrate to me all the firstborn; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine*" (Ex 13:1).

While the jubilee year seeks to ensure that each of us has what God intends, today's feast reminds us to give back to God what belongs to God. And that's where the notion of sacrifice comes from. To make a sacrifice, whether a grain offering or an animal, was to remind the people that it was God's first and they needn't develop attachment to any of it. We're told that Joseph and Mary, in presenting the firstborn Son, offered turtledoves. The turtledoves were offered as a vicarious sacrifice—that is, a substitute offering—for a human child, and roughly thirty years later, that child would be the vicarious sacrifice, offered in substitution of us.

As you may know, the word sacrifice is the combination of two words: *sacra-facere*, meaning "*to make holy*". And the biblical understanding of the word holy means that something is set apart for God, for his purposes. And the principle sacrifice you and I are to make throughout our lives, even if it's little by little, is ourselves. As it was once said, "*We have to learn how to give ourselves to burn before God like the light placed on a lampstand to give light to those who walk in darkness; like the sanctuary lamps that burn by the altar, giving off light till their last drop is consumed*" (Jose Maria Escrivá).

But if you are like me, a lack of trust, fear, distraction, has me giving myself instead just so many other things, rather than God. That with each day, over time, we could surrender ourselves, to become holy. And as Jesus was the vicarious sacrifice, offered for our benefit, may we join our offerings to his, even our smallest ones. One drop of water by itself is nothing more than one drop of water. One drop of water poured into a cask of wine becomes something greater.

But in addition to sacrifice, this feast speaks of a fundamental identity. As Jesus was consecrated to God, each of us was similarly dedicated at our Baptism. Our godparents received a light, and were told that it was to be kept burning brightly. As Jesus was rightly identified as a first-born son of God, so each of us through our baptism is most fundamentally a son or daughter of God, but also a disciple of Jesus. That is our most fundamental identity, and everything else we would associate with ourselves is secondary to that, whether you are a mother, a husband or grandparent. Important as every one of those identities are, they are secondary to our primary identity as a child of God, a disciple of Jesus.

And we can get so hung up on our secondary identities that we lose sight of who we are at the core. Some of us become so deeply woven into our political identity, the color of our skin, our ethnic identity, our ideological stances, or our associations with any of the LGBTQ+ letters, that we lose sight of our greatest truth about ourselves, and thus, what gives us roots.

We must first see ourselves as children of God and Disciples of Jesus and furthermore, strive to most deeply understand what that means and what it demands of us. Each day, do the things that are going to help you understand who you are in your most fundamental sense. Jesus, presented in the Temple was declared to be a light for the nations. A light serves purpose to help us see, to have clearer perspective.

*Jesus, Light for the nations, breathe your peace and your Holy Wisdom upon us. Give us clarity of heart and mind, that we might truly see ourselves as your brothers and sisters, as children of Your Heavenly Father. Give us strength and courage to live as your Disciples.*