



How Does God Want to Be Worshipped?

Part 1

by Joe Sixpack

Is the Old Testament still relevant? Does it mean anything for we Christians? Apart from containing the Ten Commandments and some pretty cool stories with great moral lessons, is the Old Testament still applicable to us today? After all, we live under the new covenant, and all that Old Testament stuff was for the old covenant Jews—didn't Jesus change all that?

If you are one of those people who ask such questions, or worse, you simply assert that the Old Testament is just a moldy, outdated part of the Bible that doesn't apply to we moderns, I've got some pretty important news for you. The simple fact of the matter is, the Old Testament is the basis for the entire gospel message of Jesus. In fact, if we discount the validity of the Old Testament for Christians, Jesus' entire message and mission are pointless.

Jesus said, "Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come not to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matthew 5:17). Now, this verse used to really confuse me when I was a neophyte convert. After all, the Old Testament talks about things like an eye for an eye while the Jesus talks about things like love and forgiveness. Those things seemed incompatible to me, thus making Matthew 5:17 confusing.

But those two things aren't really incompatible at all. The first clue for me was when I read that Pope Pius XII said we Catholics are new covenant Jews. In other words, Judaism was established under the old covenant, and the old was perfected by the new.

If we are to follow Christ, we must follow the teachings of the Old Testament. Under the old covenant, God always dealt directly with a mediator who acted as a conduit between Him and the people. Through this relationship, He told us how to live and how He wanted to be worshipped. In fact, even a cursory reading of the Pentateuch¹ shows us the great detail God went to in His description of how He wanted to be worshipped. He detailed to the exact dimension the construction of the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle, the meeting tent that served as the precursor to the temple, and more. He also called His priesthood from the tribe of Levi and set them apart for service to Him and the people. He governed exactly what liturgical vestments His priests were to wear, how the various sacrifices were to be made, and even how the people were to behave, dress, and the posture they were to assume during liturgical functions. And God's punishment for violating any of these norms of worship were always severe—sometimes including death.

And why shouldn't the punishment for liturgical abuses by priests or people be severe? After all, as the Jews well understood from personal experience, the very existence of man and everything good in the world was contingent upon God's benevolence and His keeping all things in

¹ The first five books of the Old Testament.

existence by keeping them in His eternal mind. So doesn't God deserve to be worshipped as He wants?

Fast forward to the time of Christ, and the fulfillment of the old covenant with the establishment of the new. Jesus established the new covenant by giving us the perfect sacrifice of the Mass (a re-presentation of His sacrifice on the cross) with the Eucharist (Himself) to supplant the imperfect sacrifices of cereal, wine and flesh under the old. Now God demands that He be worshipped particular ways under the new covenant.

Just as God the Father had established a hierarchy under the old covenant, God the Son established a hierarchy under the new... but with one huge difference. Under the old covenant, God the Father was the end-all, be-all Authority. The Levitical priesthood could make speculative decisions or interpretations of what God the Father had commanded, but God the Son went much further when He established the Church under the new and everlasting covenant.

To the apostles He said, "He who hears you hears me, and he who rejects you rejects me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). To Peter he said, "I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). For the first time in the history of mankind, God gave to the men He set apart a power and authority never given to man before! They were to speak in His name and with His authority.

God still demands to be worshipped as He deems fit, but under the new covenant He leaves it to His Church to tell us how on His behalf. Removed from the equation is severe punishment for non-compliance, except in the most extreme sacerdotal cases. But any liturgical disobedience is still a rejection of the desires and authority of the Trinity, whether that disobedience be from a priest or the laity.

For the priest, failure to obey the rubrics² exactly as they are written is disobedience to the Church, pope, bishop, and Christ Himself. Because a priest is special and set apart, his punishment from God will be worse at judgment than for the laity. But rest assured, the laity who disobey the rubrics will also find themselves facing God's wrath at their judgment.

Now let me temper this by pointing out a couple of things. First, due to the faulty catechesis of the late '60s, throughout the '70s, and into the early '80s, the laity are really not at fault for not knowing what is right and what is not. Furthermore, there were thousands of priests who "experimented" with the liturgy during that period. Most of them experimented out of ignorance, and with the mistaken understanding from authority figures that it was okay to experiment. But in either case—priest or laity—God created the mind of man to know truth. This means we all have the obligation to learn what the Church wants, which equates to what God wants.

So for the next several weeks we will examine how the laity should posture themselves during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass based on the rubrics. We will also cover some attitudes and unwritten protocols that come from the heart of the Church. While not binding under obedience, these are things that go to our love and respect of the Most Holy Eucharist. They are also in keeping with protecting the dignity of our Lord in His Eucharistic form. Admittedly, I will also convey some of my personal preferences, but they will always be identified as such.

If you thought you knew all about how you are supposed to participate in the Mass, you are likely to discover you don't know as much as you think. Most likely, you will discover What We Believe...Why We Believe It.

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² The instructions for how to perform the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass in the General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM).