

Jesus has come to fulfill the Law, or as it is stated in the New Jerusalem Bible, he has come to complete the Law. He has come to move the Law from an exterior, temporal, physical action based covenant to an interior, spiritual action based covenant that retains the exterior components of the Old Covenant Law. In other words, he raised the bar for salvation.

The Mosaic Law of the Old Covenant was intended to establish and maintain Israel as a nation state in the land of Canaan, a means to separate them and their culture from the sin of the gentiles who surrounded them. A structure for their society to help them to draw closer to God.

By his Passion and Death on the Cross, Jesus, the Lamb of God completes all the sacrificial requirements of the Old Covenant and establishes the New Covenant. A Covenant based on spirit and truth instead of nationality, opening the possibility of salvation to all nations and all peoples.

On one hand, all of us, not just a few as determined by an accident of birth, have been invited to become God's Holy People. Through Baptism we become Children of God and share in his three fold office as Priest, Prophet and King.

Think of the implications of that simple statement. As a Child of God, we have a direct connection to the Creator. As priest, we join with Jesus in offering sacrifice for salvation. As prophet, we have the ability, the obligation to teach what God has taught us through his Holy Church. As king, as ultimate servants, we are called to give all for the sake of God's kingdom by serving his people on earth.

On the other hand, in the New Covenant we now know that sin isn't just in our actions, it is also in our thoughts and in our words. It includes what we do and what we fail to do and it seems to raise the bar for salvation so high that is impossible for any of us to make it to heaven.

Just listen to today's Gospel, we can't get angry, we can't think lewd thoughts, and as we continue through the Gospel of Mathew, the list will continue to grow. If salvation is impossible, and on the face of it, salvation does seem to be completely out of our reach, how can we get there? Where is our hope?

We get there with the help of Jesus. We get there by taking advantage of the fullness of the gifts he has given us. We get there by his Divine Mercy. One thing for sure, we can't get there by ourselves.

On the road to Damascus, Paul, then known as Saul was knocked off his horse by a flash of light. "He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" He said, "Who are you, sir?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting." (Acts 9:4-5)

Saul was persecuting the Church. The Church isn't the building, the Church is the people, you and I, we in unity with the Bishops and Priests constitute the Church. Jesus identified himself as the Church. Let that sink in for a minute. Jesus identifies himself for all eternity as you and me. What an incredible gift! As his Church, we are his and he is in us.

Yet we treat this great gift so casually. We skip Mass at the slightest excuse, we pick and choose from the Law of the New and Everlasting Covenant like it is an all you can eat buffet and we are on a diet. We like the sweets, like the Eucharist, Easter, and all the joyful celebrations. But we skip over the bland, like daily prayer, the bitter, Good Friday and sacrifice, and avoid the sour, the discipline necessary to recognize our sins and do something about them.

We accept that the Priest has the gift of acting in the 'Person of Christ' of being the one and only Priest, Jesus Christ in the Sacrifice of the Mass and Confection of the Eucharist, but we ignore, and even argue against that same gift in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. We haven't gotten to Church in the past 15 years, yet call on the Church and ask, even demand the presence of the Priest as we face our final moments on this earth. And in God's mercy, the Church responds and sends her Ministers to help the prodigal and see them safely home.

We receive the Eucharist, the body, blood, soul and divinity of Christ, God becomes one with us, and instead of taking a minute in peace and quiet to say thank you and welcome him into our souls, some of us don't even return to our pew. Instead we dash out the back door of the building for what? A 10 minute head start on traffic?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God suffered and died to give us the gifts that we enjoy here, in this little Church in Hope Mills. When we marginalize his gifts, when we ignore his gifts, when we reject the gifts he has given us through his Church, we marginalize, ignore and reject ourselves; we marginalize, ignore, and reject Jesus Christ.

Let us quit making ourselves less than we are and accept our gift as sons and daughters of God, heirs to the kingdom of grace. It is time to live our faith, to fully accept God's generosity and to loose ourselves in his loving embrace.