

SERMONS FROM ST. MATTHEW'S

What Did Jesus Do? The Fourth Sunday of Advent December 20, 2009

**The Rev. Dr. Mario Gonzalez del Solar
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Richmond VA**

Hebrews 10:5-10

Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Advent is the time when we contemplate the coming of Jesus into the world as an infant human being, and his coming again as judge. It's a good time to think about what it means that Jesus came in the first place. For one thing, Jesus came to us as an example of what a human being should be. Because Jesus perfectly fulfilled God's will, he provides a model for our attitudes and our behavior. That's what's behind the question that you often see abbreviated "WWJD?": "What Would Jesus Do?"

But our reading from the letter to the Hebrews doesn't answer that question. It answers the question, "What Did Jesus Do?" Really, this is the question we all need to answer first. Trying to do God's will by asking ourselves "what would Jesus do?" in this or that situation and then trying to conform

ourselves to his model is really of no use if we are still guilty sinners before God. It's just another human scheme to reform ourselves. It won't work.

But God has had a different plan for eternity. You can see it in our second reading. The author of Hebrews paraphrases Psalm 40. He puts the words of the psalmist in the mouth of the pre-existent Son of God, before he became the human being born as Jesus: **“when Christ came into the world, he said ‘Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, ‘Here I am--it is written about me in the scroll-- I have come to do your will, O God.’”** He contrasts the obeying God's law by the physical offerings of animal sacrifices with his own personal obedience to God in his body, that is, in his whole human being.

Of course, this is what God has always been looking for from human beings: **“to do your will”** not just in outward observance, but in complete conformity to his will in our thoughts, attitudes, and desires, as well as in our behavior. “What Did Jesus Do?” He fulfilled God's perfect will for every human being. He lived his life perfectly, in every way in complete harmony with his Father's will. Though as a human being he had the power to choose to do his own will, he obeyed his Father instead.

But that's not our story, is it? One of the great things about Scripture is its psychological realism about how we don't do God's will. It describes all the strategies to get rid of our guilt that are so familiar to all of us. We shift it on to someone else: **“The woman you put here with me--she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it.” (Genesis 3:12)**

We blame it on circumstances: Aaron explains making the golden calf: **“they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!”** We say, “It was too hot,” or “It was too cold,” or “No one told me,” or “It was too cheap, or too expensive,” or choose your own excuse.

Or we simply deny we've done anything wrong. There are two ways to do this. The first is simply to say you didn't commit the offense: **“I did no such thing!”** The second is to say it wasn't an offense in the first place: **“Oh come on, it's no big deal—get over it!”** When we do this, we often make it the fault of the person whom we've offended: **“You had a problem with that? There must be something wrong with you!”** I'm reminded of Herod putting John the Baptist into jail for calling attention to his immoral love life.

Theirs is something very dark about this. It's just when I'm trying to ask “What Would Jesus Do” that I find myself using one of these strategies. I'm

not trying to do God's will. I'm trying to repair myself by bringing myself up to Jesus' standard. But I can't. It can't be done. I have to cut corners by blaming someone else, or the circumstances, or minimizing the offense, and so forth.

So "What Did Jesus Do?" He did what we can't do. He did the will of God. He says in our reading, "**I have come to do your will, O God.**" That was his mission in life as a human being. Every minute of every day of his life, he lived in perfect harmony with God's perfect will, and at the end he died in perfect harmony with God's will as well. That's why the last line of our reading says, "**by that will [that is, God's will], we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**"

No outward observance, no amount of asking what Jesus would do, no amount of "making it up" to God or someone else, can erase the reality of our guilt. Only God can do that. And he has done it! "**by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**" God put our sin to Jesus' charge and gave us his record of perfect obedience in exchange. As far as God is concerned, we are as righteous as his Son Jesus Christ. This isn't because **we** have done what **Jesus** would do. It's because we have seen the futility of our self-justification and have come to Christ for the only remedy for our guilt. This is God's will for us.

"What Did Jesus Do?" He perfectly obeyed God's will by eradicating our guilt before God in the sacrifice of his own body on the cross. The sacrifice of Christ's body on the cross is the reason, the one and only reason we celebrate Holy Communion. In this weekly remembrance, in the words of our postcommunion prayer, "**thou dost assure us of thy favor and goodness towards us.**" Jesus has set us free from our sin and its guilt.

How should we respond to what Jesus has done? First, by examining ourselves for all the little strategies and endgames we use to deflect our culpability from ourselves. We need to stop our constant drive to do the impossible: to justify ourselves. Jesus Christ has already done it, once for all. This means we need to honestly recognize our sins and confess them to God every day. Our collect for today asks, "**We beseech thee Almighty God, to purify our consciences by thy daily visitation.**" We do this by bringing our sins to God, who will forgive them and forget them because of what Jesus has done. John tells us in his first letter, "**If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.**" (1 John 1:9)

What Did Jesus Do? What we could never do. He freed us from our guilt so we can live freely and boldly to do God's will. He frees us from the burden of our past every day: "**Thy mercies are new every morning.**"

(Lamentations 3:23) He has given us his Holy Spirit to transform our own wills day by day reveal our own devious strategies for self-improvement and fill us with his own true righteousness and desire for God and his will. It is God's will that we live in the light of his mercy and love and grace. It is God's will for us to follow Jesus and tell the world what Jesus has done.

Let us pray.