

“A Holy God and His Holy People”

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Have you ever wondered what in the world is going on with Leviticus?

Genesis is pretty exciting, isn't it? There's a lot going on. Exodus is exciting as well. God shows that He is the living and true God. God rescues His chosen people from slavery in Egypt. God provides for His people even though they're a stiff-necked people. Then we come to a screeching halt at Leviticus.

I mean, really! What's up with all these strange laws?

Why are cattle okay to eat but not camels? Why are pigs unclean? The pig “parts the hoof and is cloven-footed but does not chew the cud is unclean to you (Lev. 11:7).” That seems a little on the arbitrary side doesn't it?

Why are fish with fins and scales okay to eat and not shrimp and clams? (Lev. 11:9-12)

Why are locusts, crickets, and grasshoppers okay to eat and not any other four-legged winged insect? (Lev. 11:20-23)

God answers the question of why the Israelite must obey these rules, but He doesn't explain how it works.

When God finishes His list of what's clean and unclean to eat and touch, He says:

“I am the Lord your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44a).”

At the beginning of council meetings, I've been doing an overview for the books of the Bible starting with Genesis. I've done this at two council meetings, so we're due for Leviticus. It's important for us today to understand what's up with Leviticus. The verse I just quoted contains the key to Leviticus. Another way to say it is like this:

How does a Holy God dwell with an unholy people?

That question is just as important for us as it was for the Israelites in the wilderness.

God is still holy.

If you were to stand in front of Him without the mediation of Jesus, you would be burnt to a crisp. In our natural state, with original sin, we cannot stand before God and live!

You and I are saved, however. You've been washed clean of all your sin in Holy Baptism. You've been declared forgiven of your sin in Holy Absolution. You've participated in the Holy Supper for the forgiveness of your sins. You've been declared righteous and you receive this amazing gift of grace through faith alone!

Even in this state, you would have a hard time standing before a Holy God!

I'm sure you're aware of how the Evangelist, St. John, describes himself: as the disciple whom Jesus loves. I don't believe this was St. John boasting. All of you have groups of friends. You are closer to some of them than others. It worked the same way with Jesus and the disciples. St. John describes himself as one who was closer to Jesus than the other disciples. Just as you having some friends you're closer with than other friends doesn't denigrate any of your friendships, Jesus having a close relationship with St. John doesn't denigrate His relationship with the other disciples. Or with you for that matter.

How does St. John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, describe his encounter with Jesus in the Revelation of St. John?

“When I saw [Jesus], I fell at his feet as though dead (Rev. 1:17).”

You and I are much too flippant about our relationship with Jesus.

Repent!

The pharisees understood this problem of holiness.

We far too quickly villainize the Pharisees. It may be because they are the constant foil to Jesus. You are not Jesus, however. In villainizing the Pharisee, you are doing the same thing the Pharisees are accused of!

How so?

The Pharisees added the traditions to try and help them keep the law. The law can be described as a hedge. The Ten Commandments are how God built you to work. They protect you from your sinful self.

A good example is the fourth commandment which Jesus cites against the Pharisees. Divorce rates in America are around 50%. That's the rates for non-Christians and Christians. We shamefully match the wicked culture around us. What happens with the children? When a dad abandons his responsibilities, it is harmful for any children involved. Way too many studies show this. Mom cannot be Mom and Dad. Dad cannot be Dad and Mom. What is the kid's attitude about marriage? Are they likely to get married? It seems they aren't inclined to this.

What God established for joyful co-labor and joyful raising of children in order to form the basis of society is now in shambles all around us. It shouldn't surprise us our society is suffering so many ill effects of the divorce culture.

The pharisees took the law seriously. Imagine if you're not allowed to go within a mile of some location. Let's say there's a Satanic church in Rialto and God tells us we mustn't go within a mile of this blasphemous place. The attitude of the Pharisees is to say you can't go within a mile and a half of this Satanic church. They reason that if you don't go within a mile and a half, you certainly won't go within a mile. It sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

The real problem with this attitude we will hear about next week. They think that by externally keeping the commandments, they actually keep the commandments. We'll see what Jesus says about that next week! This week, we see what sin arises from making these extra laws.

They assume that the Law of God is kept when the traditions are kept. They assume that their traditions have interpreted the Law correctly! And then they measure their holiness, and your holiness, by whether or not you keep the traditions. The Law is totally left out of consideration.

Who are you to examine before you take Holy Communion?

You're supposed to examine yourself and I know you know this. Why do we spend so much time examining others instead of ourselves? This is the same sin with which the Pharisee is guilty. And it misses the point.

The ceremonial washing and dietary restrictions are there for a very significant reason:

How does a Holy God dwell with an unholy people?

You examine yourself before the Holy Supper for the exact same reason.

How does a Holy God dwell with you?

Make no mistake, dear beloved.

God is Holy!

He is perfectly Just.

What would perfect eternal justice demand of you in your sinful state?

There is only one answer to this question.

Eternal death.

That is the seriousness of our sin! If justice were satisfied completely it would mean that you and I would die in our sin and be damned eternally.

Dear Christian, that justice has been satisfied completely.

God did not leave you in your sin. He gave up what was most important to Him. He gave His dearest treasure. He gave up One Pearl of great value. He gave up His only Begotten Son so that he might gain you as His son or daughter.

Jesus, true God and true Man, paid the price for all our sin. All the righteous anger that a Just God feels at our slightest sin was poured out in wrath on Jesus on the cross. Isaiah 53:10 says it was the will of God to crush Jesus. Verse 11 says, "Out of the anguish of His soul, He shall see and be satisfied (Is. 53:11)."

The justice of God is completely satisfied. The holiness of God is completely satisfied.

How does a Holy God dwell with you?

He *makes* you Holy!

He applies to you the forgiveness of sins that Christ won on the cross through faith and declares you holy.

There's no work that you do to make you holy. There's no work that you do to continue to be holy.

And God keeps making you holy.

Why?

It's very peculiar that the Pharisees are grumbling about rituals concerning food and Jesus points out the fourth commandment, isn't it?

We know, on this side of the resurrection, that all food is clean for our consumption.

What's up with the fourth commandment?

God is holy.

He desires a people for Himself.

He desires you, dear Christian.

He doesn't want to relate to you as some awful, scary judge up there in a place we can never get to.

He wants to relate to you as a dear father relates to his dear children.

Your first encounter with God is with your parents. Honor your father and your mother is important because God has put them in a position as of god to you. It is not random that the commandments that follow your relationship with God is about your relationship with your parents.

When a father abandons his kids or when society attacks the sanctity of fatherhood, they are attacking God Himself.

If you didn't have the best relationship with your earthly father, it is very hard to understand how God desires to be your dear, loving heavenly Father.

Sin has this effect on your life, doesn't it?

Forgiveness of sins is the answer to your sin. It wasn't freely won, but it is freely offered to you. Grasp onto this forgiveness of sins in faith so that you can stand before God and not be consumed by His Holiness.

Time is the answer to learning about your dear, loving Father in heaven. Time in the Word. Time in prayer. Time in church being served by your Father in heaven.

Dear Christian, Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, is your dear brother.

God the Father is your true Father.

May God your Father and Christ your brother continue to bless you and keep you steadfast in the one true Faith until your Brother comes again in His full glory.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.