

Give up for Lent desserts, give up caffeine, or give up social media. If you had to sacrifice one of those three, which would it be?

Many of us make these voluntary, temporary sacrifices during the forty days of Lent. But Jesus talks to us today about sacrifice on a totally different level.

Give up your hand, give up a foot, or give up an eye. Which sacrifice would you make? What a horrible question to ask. What a terrible thing to talk about in church.

But it's Jesus who talks about it. As we travel with him again today on the reality road, Jesus makes a strong point to his disciples about sacrifice. And, yes, he's speaking in hyperbole, dramatic exaggeration to make a point. The point Jesus makes is about sacrifice.

Any sacrifice, he says, is worthwhile, in order to attain the goal of eternal life. If you have to make a huge sacrifice -- if you're required to give up something precious and dear to you, if you end up letting go of something that you absolutely love -- in order to gain eternal life, it's worth it. It's 1000% worth it, says the Lord Jesus.

Why? Because when your road on this earth comes to an end, Jesus reminds, life does not end. Life goes on, forever, either in heaven or in hell. So if there's anything you need to sacrifice in order to gain eternal life with God, do it, he says. Sacrifice it. And if there's anything that's dragging you down toward hell -- anything at all that's tempting you to sin, or jeopardizing your relationship with your Maker -- give it up. Let it go. Cut it off. Sacrifice anything, Jesus says in the Gospel Lesson, to reach the goal.

Wow! What an ultra-serious, heavy-weight message Christ shares with us today! Sacrifice anything to reach the goal. What to do with this message? What will you do with it?

Brush it off? We all know plenty of people who brush Jesus off – people who never give a thought about the consequences of their relationship with God; people who live for the moment; people whose only concern is for this world's pleasures or pains. We all know people who don't believe in God, or, if they do, they brush him off to the side – people with no interest in talking about the afterlife.

Jesus talks about it, though. He warns us today that heaven and hell are real. He wants us to see the importance of getting right with God, and to see the danger into which our everyday sins can put us. Is any sin worth spending eternity in hell's never-ending torment? Are any of the temptations, enticements, and attractions of this world worth that? The Lord's message: sacrifice anything to reach the goal. Some brush off that message. What will you do with it?

Lose all hope? If we take to heart what Christ says here – if we let this message in, and really wrestle with it – it's devastating. If every time my hands, feet, or eyes caused me to sin I dismembered myself, I'd have nothing left to dismember. Jesus' words today, and the Words of God throughout the Bible, convict us of our sins. Isaiah 53:6, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray." Romans 3:23, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Sometimes, in our most painfully honest moments, guilt comes flooding in. And it should. When we come to grips with the reality of how shameful our sins are, and how deadly they are in our relationship with our holy God, despair can swallow us. We can try our best, we can make vows and promises to God, we can try to fix ourselves; but sin still has its way with us, does it not?

When Jesus talks about cutting off the hand that's causing you to sin, he's seizing your attention. He's tackling head-on the frightening reality of sin that we all live with every day. Sacrifice anything, he urges us, to reach the goal. What will you do with that message? Some lose all hope. What will you do with it?

The road Jesus traveled, and this pointed message he gives us today, lead in the end to the cross. Don't brush this message off. Don't lose all hope. Take it to the cross.

It's this instrument of death, the ancient Roman torture device, that gives us life. 1 Corinthians 1:18, from our Epistle Lesson, "The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." God's super-powered plan of salvation led Jesus to walk all the way to the cross, to his death. God's perfect Son sacrificed himself for us, for our sins. On the cross, Jesus was mocked, rejected, and tormented by his enemies; but, on the cross, he also willingly suffered all of God's wrath over our sin. Read Isaiah 53. Read Psalm 22. Read Romans 5, 8, and 10, about the horrible, beautiful sacrifice of our Lord.

In the end, it's his sacrifice that makes us whole. No cut-off hands. No dismembered feet. No eyes removed. Christ's sacrifice makes us whole. Right with God. Sins forgiven. Guilty consciences cleansed. Eternal destinies reversed. Sinners saved.

Jesus' message leads us today to the cross. Put your faith and trust in what he did for you there. Never brush off the seriousness of your sin, but never lose hope, either. Our hope is in Jesus, and him alone. Our sins are forgiven at the cross, and there alone. For there Jesus sacrificed everything, for you, that you might reach the goal.

Will you join me in prayer? “Lord, we can never repay you. Precious Savior, we are not worthy of your grace. And, yet, it washes over us today. Give us faith. Help us to trust you fully, gratefully, joyfully. May your message today about sacrifice, and about the seriousness of our sin, lead us always to the cross. For it is the power of God to save us. Thank you, Jesus. Amen.”