

Ten After Ten Session 31: Crucifixion and Death

610 Jesus gave the supreme expression of his free offering of himself at the meal shared with the twelve Apostles on the night he was betrayed. On the eve of his Passion, while still free, Jesus transformed this Last Supper with the apostles into the memorial of his voluntary offering to the Father for the salvation of men: “This is my body which is given for you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

611 The Eucharist that Christ institutes at that moment will be the memorial of his sacrifice. Jesus includes the apostles in his own offering and bids them perpetuate it. By doing so, the Lord institutes his apostles as priests of the New Covenant.

612 The cup of the New Covenant, which Jesus anticipated when he offered himself at the Last Supper, is afterwards accepted by him from his Father’s hands in his agony in the garden at Gethsemani, making himself obedient unto death... By accepting in his human will that the Father’s will be done, he accepts his death as redemptive, for he himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.

613 Christ’s death is both the Paschal sacrifice that accomplishes the definitive redemption of men, through “the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world,” and the sacrifice of the New Covenant, which restores man to communion with God by reconciling him to God through the “blood of the covenant, which was poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

614 This sacrifice of Christ is unique; it completes and surpasses all other sacrifices... it is a gift from God the Father himself, for the Father handed his Son over to sinners in order to reconcile us with himself. At the same time it is the offering of the Son of God made man, who in freedom and love offered his life to his Father through the Holy Spirit in reparation for our disobedience.

615 By his obedience unto death, Jesus accomplished the substitution of the suffering Servant... Jesus atoned for our faults and made satisfaction for our sins to the Father.

616 No man, not even the holiest, was ever able to take on himself the sins of all men and offer himself as a sacrifice for all. The existence in Christ of the divine person of the Son, who at once surpasses and embraces all human persons and constitutes himself as the Head of all mankind, makes possible his redemptive sacrifice for all.

617 The Council of Trent emphasizes the unique character of Christ’s sacrifice as “the source of eternal salvation” and teaches that “his most holy Passion on the wood of the cross merited justification for us.”

618 The cross is the unique sacrifice of Christ... But the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery is offered to all men. He calls his disciples to “take up [their] cross and follow [him].”

624 Jesus tasted death for everyone. In his plan of salvation, God ordained that his Son should not only “die for our sins” but should also “taste death,” experience the condition of death, the separation of his soul from his body, between the time he expired on the cross and the time he was raised from the dead. The state of the dead Christ is the mystery of the tomb and the descent into hell.

625 Christ’s stay in the tomb constitutes the real link between his passible state before Easter and his glorious and risen state today... [the Son] did not impede death from separating his soul from his body according to the necessary order of nature, but has reunited them to one another in the Resurrection, so that he himself might be, in his person, the meeting point for death and life.

626 Since the “Author of life” who was killed is the same “living one [who has] risen,” the divine person of the Son of God necessarily continued to possess his human soul and body.

627 Christ’s death was a real death in that it put an end to his earthly human existence. But because of the union which the person of the Son retained with his body, his was not a mortal corpse like others, for “it was not possible for death to hold him”⁴⁷⁰ and therefore “divine power preserved Christ’s body from corruption.”

628 Baptism, the original and full sign of which is immersion, efficaciously signifies the descent into the tomb by the Christian who dies to sin with Christ in order to live a new life. “We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”