

Hymn of the Month

Glory Be to Jesus (LSB 433)

According to the manifold laws of the Old Testament, a sacrifice before God was only valid if the blood was separated from the body of the offering; that is to say, it was necessary that you must drain the blood from the animal whose throat you had just slit. Curious and even gruesome, at first glance—especially to a modern people so removed from the gritty realities of ancient sacrificial practices... you'd think that cutting the poor critter's throat would be enough! But it is sensical, if you think about it, for when blood pours forth from a body—no matter the cause—it is safe to assume that that body is losing life... that it will be dead without its blood. Indeed, “the life of the flesh is in the blood,” our Lord declares (Leviticus 17:11). He goes on: “I have given it [the blood] to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is blood that makes atonement for the soul.” Truly, if we were to pay the debt of our own sin, it would cost our life, temporal and eternal. The payment is blood—*our* blood. But God in His infinite mercy provided a substitute, first in bulls and lambs and goats, and ultimately in the lifeblood of His own Son.

“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins” (Hebrews 9:22).

As we sojourn through the forty days of lent, we ponder our Lord's sacrifice, when He was “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter” (Isaiah 53:7). Our Lord gave the eternal riches of His own Blood as eternal atonement for our souls. This is the subject of our hymn's meditation this month.

It begins, “Glory be to Jesus, Who in bitter pains Poured for me the lifeblood From His sacred veins.” From the very beginning, Jesus' sacrificial Blood is at the heart of this hymn. Stanza two makes the meditation personal, as though you yourself are gazing at the scene of your atonement; and indeed, you are, every Sunday as you approach the altar, that you may drink of the Cup of Salvation. Departing from the sacrament, as in rapture, the singer bursts out in stanza three's acclamation and praise of that redeeming Blood. The next stanza alludes to the story of Genesis recounted in the book of Hebrews, whose author notes that the

Blood of Christ “speaks a better word than the blood of Abel” (Hebrews 12:24). Stanza five depicts all the host of heaven and earth singing antiphonally (i.e., back and forth) in praise of the Lamb whose Blood was shed. And the last stanza is the culmination of our devotion: an outflowing of deepest gratitude. The “mighty flood” invokes the image of Revelation 7, when we see the saints washing their robes in the Blood of the Lamb. We implore this divine flood to swell, to wash over us, as we cry out, “Praise the precious Blood!”

Unlike many lenten hymns, whose melodies are written in somber, minor keys, “Glory Be to Jesus” is set in a major key, which we usually associate with happier moods or occasions. That said, it is not a peppy tune, which would be totally disjoint from the lyrics. Rather, it is reflective: the Blood of which we sing is *salvation* to us, a supremely beautiful thing. And yet, it came at the highest cost, which is depicted in the music as it ever-so-briefly dips into a minor key midway through. This combination, along with its moderate, meditative tempo, gives the hymn a unique quality of contemplation and gratitude. How appropriate for this prayerful, lenten hymn.