**2017 4 2**

**“Thought for the Week”**

***…*** ***For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ, Who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God”***

My beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ,

As we enter the 5th week of this holy season of preparation and struggle, we now hear that our ultimate goal, our aim in life as Christians is to serve the living God. But what does it mean to serve God? We must understand that it is intimately tied to worship. In the Old Testament the sacrifices on the altar of goats and calves were considered service to God. This worship required ritual purity. They had to keep their bodies pure, if they were to enter into the presence of God. They had to abstain from immoral behavior, as well from touching dead bodies, eating certain foods, keep the Sabbath, etc. And indeed St. Paul tells us that their bodies were sanctified or made holy by these actions. They were purified on one level.

Before we criticize this form of religion, let us ask ourselves- how many in our day are seeking to keep their bodies pure? Do we understand that what happens to our bodies penetrates deep into our souls and affects the very core of our being. We must take care of our bodies for they are also the image of God. We cannot defile our bodies with immoral behavior, with destructive behaviors such as smoking or overindulging in rich foods, or in violence toward others. We must not defile our tongues with gossip, with foul language, or lies.

But then St. Paul goes on to tell us that, as those who serve Christ, we seek a much different level of sanctification and purification. It is not merely an external purification. It is not simply abstaining from immorality in our bodies but also in our hearts and in our consciences. It is having pure thoughts. Dead works cannot do this for us. That is, the human will, worldly knowledge and ethics, psychology, clever programs can never purify us from the inside. These are the sacrifices of goats and bulls. They can help us externally to live what appears to be a reasonable life in this world but they will not transform our hearts. It is only the purest of sacrifices that can do this. It is the blood of the pure One that can do this. It is through the cross that our hearts are resurrected for goodness and purity.

Beloved in Christ Jesus, our Lord dwells in us as the crucified Lord. We must also crucify and rid ourselves of all things which defile our worship of the living God. Let us get rid of all hatred, judgment, jealousy, self-indulgence and self-focus, subservience to luxury and material possessions, disobedience, unkindness, and all carnality. We cannot worship or serve any other gods. Let us love our Lord by loving others, by pursuing kindness and gentility, always looking for the best in others. Let every word that comes out of our mouths be salutary and lift people up. As we strive to participate in our Lord’s cross in this way, His cross will lift us up, His power will purify our consciences and our thoughts, and our bodies also will become ***“a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is (y)our reasonable service*** (worship) ***(Rom 12:1 NKJ)***. Amen