

**Romans 12:1-2** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Be Living Sacrifices

1. The motivation
2. Offer your bodies
3. Be Transformed

This year nineteen young people are making their confirmation promises. They have been instructed in God's Word as it is confessed in Luther's Small Catechism. They have passed a written test that shows they understand the truths they have been taught. And they have written essays to confess their faith. Now, they have this opportunity to stand up before the congregation and confess their faith. They will promise to hold to these beliefs and support this church and our shared mission. But is that all that belongs to the Christian life? Paul tells us today there is more. He calls on you, me, and all of us to be Living Sacrifices.

After years of preparation and hard work, it came down to one shot. All Jan had to do was hit the bull's-eye, and she would represent her country in the Olympics. But Jan's arrow fell short. She missed the mark.

When Jan missed her mark, she lost her opportunity to go to the Olympics. God demands that we hit the bull's-eye of holiness. But each of us has missed that mark. The consequences of our sins, however, are infinitely more devastating. The just punishment for sinners is separation from God's love and an eternal death sentences in hell.

But Paul begins our text by speaking not about God's punishment of sin, but about his mercy. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy. "In view of God's mercy"* – that phrase takes us back into eternity and reveals God's loving heart to us. Then it takes us down to Bethlehem where we see that loving heart beating in the chest of his own Son, clothed in our flesh. Next it leads us to Calvary where we see that loving heart stop beating because of our sins. Then it directs us to the word, the baptismal font, the communion altar, where that loving heart offers forgiveness for sins. Finally it directs us to the heaven that awaits us.

This is the reason you are here today and this is the motivation for all we do in life. In view of God's mercy, we confess our faith. In view of God's mercy, we live for him.

We don't deserve it. We are the ones who on Sunday sing his praises and confess his name, but then suddenly change our tune during the week. We are the one who, to fit in with the guys at work, let foul language come out of our mouths. We are the ones who watch things we shouldn't on TV and the internet. We are the ones who pray for our poor neighbor on Sunday and then on Monday we trash those same neighbors with our gossip. We are the one that trust God whole heartedly on Sunday morning, but then are unable to sleep that night due to our doubts and worries. And so we must always go back to and restart our lives *in view of God's mercy*.

What do we do with our lives from that point of view? *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.* In view of God's mercy we are to be spiritual offerings. When you think of offerings, what do you think of? Do you think of ushers walking down the aisle with offering plates? Do you think of writing a check? Do you think of the financial struggles of the congregation? Now, what do you think God thinks of? He thinks of you. He wants you.

Paul uses the word for the burnt offering described in the Old Testament book of Leviticus. It was a daily sacrifice of burning up the animal entirely. It didn't feed the priests or go to the poor or help raise money for the temple. It simply was burned up, signifying that it belonged to God and so do we.

How much are we to sacrifice? Everything! In other words, all that we are. We don't give to God a percentage of our money. We wish to use every penny to his glory. We don't give to God a percentage of our time. We wish to use every moment to honor him. We don't offer to God a few of our abilities or talents. We place on the altar all our gifts as living sacrifices to him. These are sacrifices that are indeed holy, sacrifices with which God is pleased.

Paul said, *this is your true and proper worship*. We ought to see our whole life as one big worship service. And, in fact, the traditional Lutheran worship service is a summary of the Christian life. The service begins, "In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" along with the sign of the cross which reminds us of our beginning in the Christian life at our baptism. The service ends with the singing of Simeon's Song, "Lord, now let your servant depart in peace . . ." reminding us of the end of our journey. In between, we have confession of sins with the announcement of forgiveness, prayer, hearing of God's Word, singing praise to God, offerings and receiving the Lord's Supper. So also in life we repent of our sins, we are assured of forgiveness through the sacrifice of Christ. We spend time in prayer, in Bible reading, in offering our lives to God, and the worship with others around the Lord's table.

In view of God's mercy, do you live your life as worship? Do you do all things to the glory of God? Are you reading your Bible and involved in Bible Study? Is daily repentance apart of your life? Are you regular in prayer and the Lord's Supper? Do you give not only treasure but time in service to the church and others? If not, perhaps we need to take another look at God's mercy.

When we were born, we were part of this dark, sinful world. We belonged to the family of unbelief and sin. In his mercy, God called us out of that darkness into his wonderful light. In Baptism he adopted us, covered us with Jesus' clean clothes, and put his name on us. He has given us a new life in Christ and has prepared heaven as our home.

Until he takes us there, we still live in this sinful world. This world still loves idolatry and adultery, materialism and immorality, lies and lovelessness, selfishness and greed. Since sinful natures still cling to us and the sinful world still surrounds us, it's dangerously easy for us to start speaking and acting like those who belong to the world. But the behavior of the sinful world is off-limits for children of God.

So in view of God's mercy Paul urges us, *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. Our lives are different. Our lives lead to heaven, not just to be lived out on earth. Talents are for serving Christ not just for making a living. God's commandments are guidelines for peaceful living, not policeman's rules that take the fun out of life. Marriage, morals, money, family, business and pleasure are seen through the lens of God's mercy, not unbelief's selfishness. (Adapted from Richard Lauersdorf, *The Northwestern Lutheran*, June 1, 1988, p. 203)

Why? Why should I spend my time at church meetings, working on school projects or taking meals to a hurting family? Why should I save myself for marriage? Why should I consider full time service in the church as a pastor or teacher? Why should I give hard-earned dollars away to the church? Do we have to ask "why?" *In view of God's mercy*, he says, and that phrase takes us right back to the foot of the cross. That makes the "why" clear and when the "why" is clear, the "what" will follow.

*Be transformed by the renewing of your mind*. This never stops. We never stop renewing our minds. It's like the war on terror; it will never be over. You are not done renewing your mind on Confirmation Sunday. Never stop striving to be a better you. Never stop striving to be a living sacrifice.

That's why it's so important to come to church on Sunday. That's why it's so important to study God's Word in your home during the week. God through his Word and Sacraments renews us. Through these means of grace – an only through these means – he give us the strength to fight the good fight.

Confirmation means strengthening. It doesn't mean stopping. Never stop growing. Never stop transforming. Never stop being a better you than you were yesterday. In view of God's mercy, always be living sacrifices.