

GOOD FRIDAY REFLECTION

CHRIST DIED FOR OUR SINS

Vicarious atonement is the idea that Jesus Christ took the place of mankind, suffering the penalty for sin. Another way of putting it is that Jesus MADE UP for our sins. Vicarious means “done in place of or instead of someone else.” So, in literal terms it means that Jesus was substituted for humanity and punished for our faults in order to pay for the sins we had committed and reconcile us to God. But this was written about 800 years before in the reading which we heard today from Isaiah.

According to the Bible, vicarious atonement is an accurate description of Jesus Christ’s role in our salvation. First Peter 3:18 refers to Jesus’ death as “the righteous [suffering] for the unrighteous.” Mark 10:45 indicates that He came to “give His life as a ransom for many.” Believers “were bought with a price” by Jesus, according to 1 Corinthians 6:19–20,

Second Corinthians 5:21 clearly says that God the Father “made him to be sin who knew no sin,” meaning there was an exchange that took place at the cross. Our sin was transferred to Jesus, and our suffering became Jesus’ suffering. His death was vicarious—Jesus was our Substitute. His death atoned for us—Jesus made amends between us and God. Jesus was condemned instead of us. Even in the Old Testament, prophets such as Isaiah spoke of the Messiah’s taking the penalty for sin on our behalf (Isaiah 53:5).

In broad terms, human beings are hopelessly lost and unable to be reconciled to God on their own. This is because of our sin, which no amount of good works can undo. Since God is perfect and holy, we can never hope to pay for our own sins in order to be with Him. So Jesus Christ was offered as our substitute. Instead of our trying—and failing—to cover the penalty for our own sins, Jesus became the vicarious object of God’s justice. With this exchange our sin was paid for, and we can be declared righteous in Christ (Romans 4:5; 8:1).

However, we must claim as our own the salvation He won for us by living as he taught. It’s like wiring a house. Jesus has done the wiring by His death and resurrection. We have to turn on the light. Some, however, prefer to remain in darkness. But we claim the merits of this atonement in the Sacrament of Penance. Turning on the light means believing in Jesus so that the salvation he won for us by atoning for our sins through his death and resurrection will be ours both here and in the hereafter. The choice is ours.