

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN LIGHT OF THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

XIII. Catholicism's Earthly Ritualism Versus Christ's Heavenly Ministry

(Hebrews 9:1-14)

I. Introduction

- A. A number of the members of our Church have come from Roman Catholic backgrounds, and they often seek support in Biblical truth to counter the strong, errant indoctrination they experienced in their past.
- B. The epistle to the Hebrews was written to counter the errant traditionalism of first century Judaism that was similar in theological thrust to much of Catholicism, so we study Hebrews for edification in this matter.
- C. The author of Hebrews in Hebrews 9:1-14 contrasted Judaism's inferior earthly priestly rituals with Christ's heavenly priestly ministry, what applies to the contrast of Catholicism's earthly rituals versus Christ's heavenly high priestly ministry. We study the passage for our insight, application and edification:

II. Catholicism's Earthly Ritualism Versus Christ's Heavenly Ministry, Hebrews 9:1-14.

- A. One important factor that accounts "for the power and influence of the Roman Catholic Church . . . is its ritualistic worship." (Lorraine Boettner, Roman Catholicism, 1978, p. 270) "The gorgeous vestments, colorful processions, pageantry and mystifying symbolism, the stately music, the solemn intonations of the priests in singsong voice, the flickering candles, the tinkling bells, the sweet smelling incense, the dim light of the cathedral where Mary holds sway – all are designed to impress the senses and the emotions." (Ibid.) "Romanism is largely a religion of ceremonials and rituals" where the people "are largely spectators watching the pageantry and are supposed to be blessed simply because they are there." (Ibid., p. 273)
- B. Hebrews 9:1-14 provides a critique of Catholicism's earthly religious ritualism, for it contrasts the earthly rituals of the Aaronic priesthood in the dispensation of the Mosaic Law with Christ's heavenly priesthood, revealing the vast superiority of Christ's ministry in both action and meaning to all that is earthly (as follows):
 - 1. The earthly Aaronic priesthood was marked by earthly pageantry, Hebrews 9:1-5:
 - a. The tabernacle contained the Holy Place, where, upon entering the outer curtain, one noticed the Lampstand and the Table of Shewbread, Hebrews 9:1-2.
 - b. In front of the second curtain to the Holy Place was the Holiest of Holies stood the Altar of Incense, and behind that second curtain was the Ark of the Covenant covered on all sides with gold in which was a golden urn holding the manna, and Aaron's staff that budded and the tables of the covenant, Heb. 9:3-4.
 - c. Above the Ark were the cherubim who overshadowed the Mercy Seat, Hebrews 9:5.
 - d. When the articles of the Mosaic tabernacle were dedicated for priestly service, the Aaronic priests entered the Holy Place of the tabernacle to perform their services there to the Lord, Hebrews 9:6.
 - e. However, the Holiest of Holies was reserved for the Hebrew high priest to enter once a year with blood shed first for his own sanctification since he was a sinner, and next for the sins of the people, Hebrews 9:7.
 - f. The Holy Spirit thus signified that the way into the Holiest of Holies was not yet manifested while the first tabernacle on earth was still standing, Hebrews 9:8. In this initial arrangement, gifts and sacrifices offered could not perfect the conscience of the worshiper but deal only with the rituals of drinks and various washings, regulations for the body imposed until the time of reformation, Hebrews 9:9-10 ESV.
 - 2. However, the High Priestly ministry of Christ was marked by vast heavenly superiority, Hebrews 9:11-14:
 - a. In superior contrast to the Aaronic priesthood, when Christ appeared as a High Priest of the good things that have come in the current era following the cross, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with human hands in this creation, He entered once for all into heaven's holy places, Hebrews 9:11.
 - b. He did not bring the blood of animals as in the earthly Aaronic priesthood, but He brought His own blood, entering the heavenly tabernacle once for all, having obtained eternal redemption for us, Heb. 9:12.
 - c. The earthly Aaronic priestly ministrations of the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer used in sprinkling the unclean figuratively signified the purifying of the flesh (Hebrews 9:13), but far more does the blood of Christ Who through the eternal Holy Spirit offered Himself without spot to God purge our consciences from performing dead legalistic works to serve the living God, Hebrews 9:14!

Lesson: Just as Christ's heavenly High Priestly ministry far more effectively and simply purges us from sin and its effects than did the earthly, Aaronic priesthood that merely foreshadowed Christ's fulfilling priestly ministry, so Christ's priesthood fulfills what the empty ritualism of Roman Catholicism cannot do.

Application: May we not rely on earthly religious rituals, but Christ's High Priestly heavenly ministry for blessing.