



My Dear Parishioners,

Praised be Jesus Christ! The High Holy Days of the Christian calendar celebrate the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ: the world's re-creation and redemption. But for the Jewish People, their

High Holy Days -- Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur-- celebrate the world's creation and need for redemption. And this weekend begins their celebration of those days. In light of that, I share a reflection on these days. If we are ever to appreciate our re-creation and redemption in Christ, we must first appreciate our creation in Him and our need for Him. And strangely enough, the Jewish celebrations can assist in that appreciation. The following reflection is from myjewishlearning.com

Peace,

Fr. Rogers

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As human beings, we try to define our place in the vast, mysterious universe in which we live. We want to understand our nature and how we relate to other living things. We think about what came before us and what will come after. We envision the end of life and ponder what follows. The time between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur respond to this need to understand ourselves and our place in the universe. At one point during the confession of the Yom Kippur, we articulate these questions in a way that seems to indicate a pessimistic, negative valuation of human beings and human life:

*“What are we? What is our life? What is our piety? What is our virtue? What is our salvation? What is our strength? What is our accomplishment? What shall we say before You, O Lord our God and God of our ancestors? Are not all the mighty as nothing before you, men of renown as if they did not exist? The wise as if they lacked knowledge, the discerning as if they had no wisdom, for most of their deeds are valueless and the days of their lives a mere nothing before You. Man’s superiority to the beast is nonexistent, for all is futile.”*

Yet, while these parts of the liturgy clearly indicate the insignificance of humankind in the face of divine presence, other parts raise a different point. The *Ne’ilah* prayer quoted above goes on to state, *“You have set man aside from the very beginning, permitting him to stand before You.”* On the one hand, then, human life seems to have very little value in the vast scheme of things, but on the other hand, we sense a special relationship between us and our Creator. Thus, for all our limitations, we are nonetheless creatures of worth.

On this matter, the sages gave us excellent advice. They said that each person should carry two notes in his or her pockets. On one would be the words, *“For my sake the world was created.”* On the other, *“I am but dust and ashes.”* When we despair of our value we look at the first. When we are too haughty, we look at the second.

This dichotomy is not between body and spirit, but between good and evil. Although we separate ourselves on Yom Kippur from bodily needs as much as possible, we do so only in order to emphasize the importance of the spiritual side of life, which we usually ignore, afflicting ourselves in order to gain a higher degree of holiness. The object is not to make this asceticism a part of everyday life, but to be able to return to normal life with greater self-knowledge and awareness. The High Holy Days are about choice. We are not toys of fate. We are not destined for sin and evil. We have the possibility of choosing the path to life. No matter what we have been, we can change and become better. If we seem to emphasize the dark side of life and of human beings, it is only in order to come to terms with our limitations, to recognize our faults, and to prepare to better ourselves.