Is the Old Testament (OT) Old News?

There might be some tendency to kind of set aside the Old Testament (OT) in Sacred Scripture, thinking, perhaps, that it is something like old news and thus, in some sense, irrelevant. Or maybe it seems like just a bunch of history of Israel. But in fact, the OT is, first of all, the Word of God just as much as the New Testament and, more to the point here, it is filled with very helpful teaching. One of the big things in the OT are prefigurements of what was to come with our Lord (called typology by Scripture scholars). There are many people in the OT who were prefigurements of our Lord. For example, Sacred Scripture says that Moses 'stood in the breach' between God and the Israelites, pleading for mercy on their behalf after they worshipped the golden calf. God relented of the punishment they deserved because of Moses. Moses prefigured (or was a 'type' of) our Lord here. Recall the whole event of Jacob (renamed Israel) and his 12 sons, one of which was Joseph. Joseph's brothers hated him and sold him into slavery for 20 pieces of silver, but then Joseph ended up saving his brothers, forgiving them, and being reconciled with them. Not only did Joseph (of the OT) prefigure our Lord here, but this whole event reflected what was to come with our Lord's arrival.

Now at this point a person might say, oh well, ok; or they might even go so far as to say: well, that's interesting but...I know what Jesus did, what's the big deal! Knowing what Jesus did is good but it's only a start. Knowing what He did (information), is different than really having a deep understanding and appreciation for what He did. This is where the concrete, tangible events of the OT can be helpful. Why? Well, even the ancient philosophers realized and understood how the human mind works, and their understanding was picked up later on by the great teachers of the faith (Church Fathers and Doctors, for example, like Augustine & Aquinas). These great philosophers and (later) teachers of the faith pointed out that the first thing the human mind grasps is material reality; the mind doesn't stop there but it does start there. The mind then abstracts from material reality to higher, spiritual or immaterial, reality. For example, you can't pick up truth or goodness and hold it in your hand – it's not something physical or tangible – and yet you know what those things are. That's because your mind has abstracted from material reality to immaterial reality. SO...the concrete, tangible people and events of the OT are meant to help us understand more deeply, the higher spiritual realities that came with our Lord. As you think about Moses 'standing in the breach between God and the Israelites,' or Joseph and his brothers, is it not easier to then understand what it is our Lord did and does for us?

What prompted all of this is the first reading from a week ago Friday, which was from the book of Exodus. It is possibly the greatest typology or prefigurements in the OT. Recall what had happened – Jacob and his 12 sons had gone to Egypt because of the great famine and they ended up settling in there. The Israelites then lived there in peace with the Egyptians for about 4 or 5 hundred years. But they grew in numbers so much that the Pharaoh eventually came to fear them and he put them under a cruel and harsh enslavement – hard labor, beatings, and even killing all of the male babies. The Israelites cried out to God and God sent Moses to deliver them from the Egyptians (this started with the burning bush). Moses went to the Pharaoh 9 times to ask him to release the Israelites; each time the Pharaoh refused and each time Moses warned him of a terrible plague that would beset them if he refused and, of course, each time the plague came. The 10th plague was that the "angel of death" would go through all of Egypt striking down the first born of both man and beast alike. Pharaoh still refused so the 10th plague did come. But now here comes the important part. God said the same thing would happen to the Israelites – they too would be struck by the angel of death – *unless* they did the following: sacrifice an unblemished lamb, eat its flesh, sprinkle its blood on the doorposts. The 'angel of death' would pass over them (hence the name Passover) if, and only if, they did this. This seems ridiculous. Why would God tell them to do such a thing? It doesn't seem to make any sense unless...we step back and consider it in light of the New Testament – what our Lord brought and did. I'm sure the parallels are obvious:

The lamb is sacrificed Our Lord is sacrificed

An *unblemished* lamb

Our Lord is unblemished by sin.

Jews told to eat the lamb

Our Lord tells us to eat His flesh

Jews told to commemorate the Passover Our Lord says: do this in memory of me

• Deliverance from physical bondage Deliverance from spiritual bondage

• Jews spared physical death by "participating" in the sacrifice of the lamb, we are spared eternal or spiritual death by participating in Christ's sacrifice.

The Passover, of course, prefigured: our Lord's sacrifice, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and the Holy Eucharist. The lamb that was sacrificed laid down its life to save another; this is what our Lord did for us. Sprinkle the doorposts with blood – we must immerse ourselves in the Blood of Christ, which means what? Receiving the mercy, He won for us through real repentance (contrition, sorrow for sin), Confession, and conversion. We are to participate in the lamb's sacrifice, not by killing it but rather by following it – sacrificing ourselves for the sake of what is right and good and true, in response to the love of the Lamb. Those sacrifices are then united with His, in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass; Jesus makes His Passion present in the Mass and we stand with Him – like Mary & John – offering our sacrifices to Him. Then we receive Him in the closest most intimate way possible here in this life – by eating the flesh of the sacrificial lamb in Holy Communion.

What this tangible, concrete event of the Passover might help us understand the most, though, is what our Lord really did for us. Go back to the book of Exodus and read about the cruel, harsh enslavement that the Israelites were under when in Egypt; really ponder it, imagine it. What they were delivered from by the blood of their lamb is a small piece of dust compared to what our Lord delivered us from. If our love of God is cool, if our gratitude to Him is almost nothing, it is because we do not really realize the gravity and consequences of our sins, it is because we have not really entered into repentance and conversion. That is to say, we have not yet sprinkled our doorposts with the Blood of the Lamb. If I have not really entered into repentance or if I think I don't need to – for whatever reason, because "I'm a good person" or whatever it is I use to justify avoiding it – then I <u>am</u> still subject to the avenging angel. There is no other way to avoid that avenging angel; just going through the motions is not enough. The Blood of the Lamb has to be on the doorposts. It is sad to see so many take this lightly or even scoff at it and brush it aside. Why? Yes, repentance (acknowledgement of and deep sorrow for sin) stings a little but it leads to true freedom. Do you think you will ever regret it? Is it not much more likely that our Lord is in fact truthful and that we will regret it if we don't do it?

We might also take notice of the fact that once the Israelites were delivered, they were to head towards the promised land. The material promised land of the Israelites corresponds to the higher reality of Heaven. One has to be delivered (immersed in the Blood of the Lamb) before he can get on the way. If you continue to read the book of Exodus you will see that, instead of heading headlong to the promised land, they ended up wandering around in the desert for 40 years. Almost none of those who were initially delivered actually made it to the promised land. That's because, after their initial delivery (that we receive, for example, in Baptism), after seeing the great and mighty works of God, what did they do? Extend gratitude? Commit themselves fully to the Lord? No, they grumbled and groused about God and against Him. The same is and will be true for us. Once on the way, we have to stop grumbling and proceed with minds fixed on Him.

Now sometimes a person has enough humility, and thus enough openness to God, to say: it's true, I don't really have a deep sorrow of, or even knowledge of, my sins; how do I get it? This is a topic that we will return to over and over again. Yes, devotional practices will help if sincerely engaged in, personal prayer, weekday Mass, Confession, and so on – all of these are very helpful. But probably the biggest thing that keeps most Mass-attending Catholics from really getting on the path to *the* promised land, to immersing themselves in the blood of the lamb – the mercy of God – is just what we have talked about: a failure to really stop, put everything else out of our mind, and really ponder the mysteries of the faith. Having something to read can often help with this (recollection). Scripture is excellent, of course, but if you are looking for some more reading material, one of my favorites is: "The Way of Divine Love," based on the visions of Sr Josefa Menendez. Sr (Blessed) Josefa recounts the messages she received from our Lord, and they are striking, captivating.

Let us come to one last thing that is needed, and which can also be drawn out of Exodus. One of the first things God told Moses at the burning bush was: remove your sandals *because*... this is holy (or sacred) ground. Sacred, in regard to created things, means things set aside for God. It is a necessary part of our worship of God. It says: you are special, Lord. Conversely, having nothing sacred, or not treating what is sacred as sacred says: nothing special here, you're actually not special to me. A sense of the sacred has been largely lost in the world today, all too often even in the human dimension of the Church. The church itself and even the Eucharist are all too often treated casually, as if to say: nothing special here. How many prepare themselves to receive our Lord by making a good Confession – as if to say: ah, it's no big deal. Let us consciously and intentionally begin to build this sense of the sacred more and more in our parishes.

God bless you, Fr Kuhn.