

The Fifth Sunday of Lent

Hebrews 5:1-10

When we think of our Lord Jesus as High Priest, we think of Him in a position of glory; *if* we think at all of our Lord Jesus as High Priest, that is. I suspect that to many Christians, it is not an aspect of the faith they think about very much. We all should, though. For it is as our High Priest that our Lord Jesus saves us. And Him serving as our High Priest in Heaven is not only the very heart of the Letter to the Hebrews, of which we hear today, but also of our life as His Church, that is: it is the heart of the worship in which His very salvation is given to us, and so, Him serving as our heavenly High Priest is the very heart of our salvation, and we should not treat this truth as if it were an unimportant aspect of the faith.

At any rate, when we think of our Lord Jesus as High Priest, those of us who do, and we all should, we think of Him in a position of *glory*; and so it might seem somewhat untimely that we hear of our Lord Jesus as High Priest today, at the height of Lent.

It is not, though. For as we hear it today, *in the days of His flesh*, although He is the Son of God, *He offered up prayers and supplications with vehement cries and tears, and learned obedience from His sufferings*. And this is how He has become the Author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, as the High Priest designated by God. And so it is as appropriate for us to have our Lord Jesus presented to us as our heavenly High Priest at the height of Lent as it is at any other time. So there we are. And so, let us learn, then, from Holy Scripture, what it means that our Lord Jesus is our heavenly High Priest.

Every high priest taken from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men with regards to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins. This was the what priests did under the old covenant; but only the high priest could go behind the Temple curtain into the Most Holy Place, and *only once a year*, as it is written later on in the Letter to the Hebrews, *and not without blood to offer in atonement for himself and for the ignorance of the people*. During the year, people would have priests offer sacrifices on the altar outside for their sins and missteps; but on the Day of Atonement a sacrifice was made for all the sins of all the people, and its sinfulness altogether, in its entirety, all its ungodliness, or its *ignorance*, as Holy Scripture calls it, with regards to God.

Yes, for failure to know God and His ways is *ungodliness*; it is not an *excuse*, as we tend to assume, eager as we are to make excuses for unbelievers, and for that ungodly ignorance of our own which comes from ungodly indifference with regards to the things of God.

Bringing this sacrifice once a year was not all the high priest would do, though, nor bringing other sacrifices. Apart from being the chief liturgist of the people, he was also its chief teacher and spiritual leader and guide and judge in matters pertaining to God and the faith; its *Pastor*, if you like, and also if you don't, by the way! Therefore is it relevant, what the Letter to the Hebrews points out, that the high priest *can have compassion upon those who are ignorant and going astray, since he himself is also subject to weakness*.

Furthermore, we learn today that *no man takes this honour for himself, but he who is called by God, just as Aaron was*; just like in the Church of Christ no man can take for himself the position of Pastor and become a Pastor because he would like to be one, or feels that he should be, rather, a man becomes a Pastor by the calling of the Church of Christ. Even less can a woman take for herself the position of Pastor, for Holy Scripture forbids that a woman be that, because it goes against the order of God as established at Creation. As when the holy Apostle Paul writes, although not *only* then and there: *Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man*. When a woman acts as Pastor, it is evident that she is either unfamiliar with the Word and will of God, or disregards His Word and will. So why would a Christian learn from her? Well, no Christian should; Holy Scripture forbids it! To embrace the sin of others is to sin against God yourself. So there is that, and there that is.

So also Christ did not glorify Himself to become High Priest, we then hear, but He did, who said to Him: "You are My Son, today I have begotten You." As He also says, in another place: *"You are Priest forever"*.

Our Lord Jesus is the Son of God, whom He has appointed Heir to all things, as the opening paragraph of the Letter to the Hebrews says it, *through whom also He created the world, the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature*. He is God Himself from eternity, Heir to the Father, who shall never die, but that is not a problem, for the Son is already equal to the Father in glory, and in being God. And He whom the Father appointed Heir to all things from eternity, He also appointed High Priest from eternity, and Saviour of sinners.

Yes, for from eternity God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit had resolved in His heart that He would reveal His glory, namely that He is good to the unthankful and evil, in the salvation of sinners. And of this His salvation the ordinances of the old covenant were but foreshadowings, the Temple and the Priesthood, imageries, indicating by their apparent and obvious incompleteness that something greater was to come, to inspire in the hearts and minds of the people the longing for full and complete salvation from God.

No one was prepared, though, for just how great the salvation of God would turn out to be; for no one knew just how good God is, that the greatest glory He knows is His goodness and His love for sinners, that is: His love for us who are evil at heart, and do evil.

For the salvation of sinners God would not chose for Himself the best and most qualified among men, for none ever was qualified, rather, *they have all turned aside, together they have become worthless, and there is none who does good, not even one*, as not only one Psalm says it, but two, nor would He send one of His servants, an angel, rather, from eternity had He appointed the Son as the High Priest who would give Himself up to suffer as the only sacrifice sufficient to actually make up for the sin of all sinners, for real. And so, as the high priests before Him had all been *subject to weakness*, so the Almighty One also assumed the weakness of human nature to suffer and struggle with temptation, as all sinners must, and as all sinners do, except for those who are so steeped in their ungodliness that it never occurs to them that temptation could and should be resisted, and they do whatever evil they want as the most natural thing of all, without a second thought, or even a first thought. But unlike sinners the Son of God resisted all temptation, and overcame it; so far greater is His goodness, His love for the Father, and His love for us sinners, than the human weakness to which He had made Himself subject. *In the days of His flesh He offered up prayers and supplications*, as we hear it today, *with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to deliver Him from death, and was heard because of His godliness*.

And heard He was, although He was *not* delivered from death, not at first; but then, His prayer was not a *decree*, not a command, for it is blasphemous for any human being to give orders to God, as if He were your subordinate; on the contrary, He entrusted Himself to the goodness of God in *submission* to His will: *My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass me by; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*.

And so, in submission to the Father's will, He would take from the Father's hand the cup poured and prepared for Him from eternity. Baptised with the Baptism of sinners, and clothed and covered with the sin of sinners, He would have Himself crucified, hung up high toward Heaven, presented to God as the only atoning sacrifice that could actually outweigh the sin of all sinners and set us free, for real, from all sin and guilt and impurity before God and rescue us from eternal death and damnation unto eternal life with Him instead, in the fullness of His glory; as it is written of Him later in the Letter to the Hebrews: *By a single offering He has once for all brought those who are being made holy to perfection.*

And as we hear it today, *though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience through His suffering*; not that He had to learn to obey, as such, for the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit were always united in love, neither ever seeking anything at the expense of the other. Rather, *He learned obedience from His suffering* in that He came to know *intimately* the cost of obedience, cursed and condemned into the fullness of suffering, the righteous wrath of God against all wrongdoing and wrong, the hatred of His holy goodness against evil and impurity, against unbelief and all other ungodliness. *And thus having brought all things to completion*, as we hear it today, *He has become the Author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and the High Priest designated by God.*

Having suffered the punishment for all sin, and paid its price and penalty, in full and in abundance, He now stands as our High Priest in Heaven. He presents to the Father what He has done for us, and what He has made us to be, pure and perfect, free from all guilt and impurity. *We have a High Priest seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens*, as it is said later in the Letter to the Hebrews, *a Minister in the Sanctuary and the true Tabernacle*. He leads us in the worship that is pleasing to God, which is for God have His goodness presented to Him. And He who has become *the Author of eternal salvation for all who obey Him, and the High Priest designated by God* calls His Church and His Christians to join Him in His heavenly worship and present to the Father, with Him, what He has done, and present ourselves as He presents us, holy and righteous, in the celebration of His salvation *in my remembrance*; and as we obey Him in this, His salvation is ours, fully and for real. This is the glory of God; His goodness *is* His glory; so good is God.

O Christ, our God, Lamb of God, who have borne, and take away, the sin of the world, have mercy upon us! Amen.