

"JESUS, OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST"
HEBREWS 5:1-10
FIFTH S. IN LENT
MESSIAH, BOERNE
MARCH 17, 2024

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY
SPIRIT. AMEN.

TEXT: HEBREW 5:1-10

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST:

A FAMILIAR ARGUMENT AMONG CHILDREN WHICH EVERY PARENT
WILL RECOGNIZE IS "WHO'S THE BEST." FOR EXAMPLE, TOM TELLS
DICK, "I CAN RUN FASTER THAN YOU," AND JANE TELLS SALLY, "I
CAN JUMP ROPE MORE TIMES THAN YOU." OF COURSE, CHILDREN
AREN'T THE ONLY ONES WHO ARGUE ABOUT WHO'S THE BEST—SO DO
ADULTS, AS WE SEE AMONG JESUS' DISCIPLES IN OUR GOSPEL
READING TODAY. JAMES AND JOHN THOUGHT THEY WERE JESUS'
BEST DISCIPLES AND DESERVED TO SIT AT JESUS' RIGHT AND LEFT
HANDS IN HEAVEN, AND MARK TELLS US THE OTHER DISCIPLES WERE
INDIGNANT AT THEM SINCE THEY, TOO, THOUGHT THAT THEY WERE
THE BEST. BUT JESUS SAYS, "WHOEVER WOULD BE GREAT AMONG
YOU MUST BE YOUR SERVANT, AND WHOEVER WOULD BE FIRST AMONG
YOU MUST BE SLAVE OF ALL" (MK 10:43-44). USING THESE
CRITERIA, IT'S CLEAR TO SEE WHO'S THE BEST: JESUS, OUR
PERFECT HIGH PRIEST.

THE AUTHOR OF THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS MAKES IT CLEAR
TO HIS READERS THAT JESUS IS THE BEST HIGH PRIEST IN MANY

WAYS. OUR TEXT BEGINS: "EVERY HIGH PRIEST CHOSEN FROM AMONG MEN IS APPOINTED TO ACT ON BEHALF OF MEN IN RELATION TO GOD, TO OFFER GIFTS AND SACRIFICES FOR SINS" (V 1). SERVING AS THE HIGH PRIEST OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL WAS NO "SELF-CHOSEN" TASK. GOD CHOSE AARON AND HIS SONS TO SERVE AS HIS PRIESTS AND THE REST OF THE MEN OF TRIBE OF LEVI TO SERVE IN VARIOUS CAPACITIES IN HIS TEMPLE. AARON WAS THE FIRST HIGH PRIEST CHOSEN AND APPOINTED BY GOD. "SO ALSO," OUR TEXT SAYS, "CHRIST DID NOT EXALT HIMSELF TO BE MADE A HIGH PRIEST, BUT [HE] WAS APPOINTED BY [GOD]" (V 5).

ANOTHER ASPECT OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S OFFICE WAS TO OFFER PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION FOR THE PEOPLE. SUCH PRAYERS WERE OFFERED BY PRIESTS DAILY FOR THE ISRAELITES WHO CAME TO THE TEMPLE TO GIVE GIFTS AND MAKE VARIOUS SACRIFICES, BUT ON ONE DAY IN PARTICULAR, THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, THE HIGH PRIEST MADE INTERCESSION FOR ALL THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. ON THAT DAY, HE ALONE ENTERED THE HOLY OF HOLIES WITH BLOOD FROM A SACRIFICED LAMB, AND THE HIGH PRIEST'S PRAYERS TO GOD AND THE BLOOD Poured OUT UPON THE COVER OF THE ARK OF THE COVENANT, ALSO KNOWN AS THE MERCY SEAT, SERVED TO TURN GOD'S WRATH AWAY FROM THE SINS OF HIS PEOPLE. ON THE DAY OF ATONEMENT, BY MEANS OF THE HIGH PRIEST'S INTERCESSORY PRAYERS AND SACRIFICES, GOD FORGAVE THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL.

JESUS ALSO OFFERED UP INTERCESSORY PRAYER FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN, CHAPTER 17, JESUS PRAYS IN THE UPPER ROOM HIS HIGH PRIESTLY PRAYER FOR ALL BELIEVERS—THAT GOD WOULD SANCTIFY THEM BY HIS WORD AND KEEP THEM HOLY THROUGH FAITH IN HIM (VV 15, 17). AND HE CONTINUED TO PRAY THROUGHOUT THAT MAUNDY THURSDAY EVENING. IN OUR TEXT, THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS TELLS US:

IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH, JESUS OFFERED UP PRAYERS AND SUPPLICATIONS, WITH LOUD CRIES AND TEARS TO HIM WHO WAS ABLE TO SAVE HIM FROM DEATH, AND HE WAS HEARD BECAUSE OF HIS REVERENCE.

THIS VERSE REFERS SPECIFICALLY TO JESUS' PRAYERS TO THE FATHER IN THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE.

WHEN JESUS WENT OUT FROM THE UPPER ROOM WITH HIS DISCIPLES ACROSS THE KIDRON VALLEY TO THE GARDEN, HE DID SO WITH FULL KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT WAS GOING TO HAPPEN TO HIM (JN 18:4). HE KNEW THAT THE SACRIFICE HE WOULD BRING TO APPEASE GOD'S WRATH OVER THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE WOULD BE FAR DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF THE PRIESTS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT. IN THE OLD TESTAMENT PRIEST MADE SACRIFICES FOR THEIR OWN SINS AND ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE PEOPLE, BUT JESUS "OFFERED FOR ALL TIME A SINGLE SACRIFICE FOR SINS" (HEB 10:12). THE ONE SACRIFICE THAT JESUS KNEW HE WOULD OFFER WOULD BE HIS OWN LIFE. IT WAS A SACRIFICE NO OTHER PRIEST WOULD WANT OR EVEN BE CAPABLE OF OFFERING.

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR US TO COMPREHEND THE MAGNITUDE OF JESUS' SUFFERING IN GETHSEMANE. HAVING LEFT MOST OF THE DISCIPLES AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE GARDEN, HE BROUGHT HIS INNER CIRCLE WITH HIM FOR COMFORT AND COMPANIONSHIP. HIS WORDS TO THOSE DISCIPLES GIVE US A LITTLE INSIGHT INTO THE DEPTH OF HIS SORROW: "MY SOUL IS OVERWHELMED WITH SORROW TO THE POINT OF DEATH. STAY HERE AND WATCH WITH ME" (MT 26:38). THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS ALSO HELPS US UNDERSTAND HIS DISTRESS AS HE DECLARES THAT HIS PRAYERS WERE SPOKEN AMIDST LOUD CRIES OF ANGUISH AND WITH TEARS RUNNING DOWN HIS FACE. JESUS KNEW THAT HE WOULD NOT ONLY SACRIFICE HIS LIFE FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD BUT THAT HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN WOULD FORSAKE HIM BECAUSE OF THOSE SINS. LUKE DESCRIBES HIS AGONY: "HIS SWEAT WAS LIKE DROPS OF BLOOD FALLING TO THE GROUND" (22:44).

THUS, BY MEANS OF PRAYER AND SACRIFICE JESUS FULFILLED THE OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST PERFECTLY. HE WAS ABLE TO DO SO BECAUSE HE WAS NOT ONLY TRUE MAN LIKE THOSE HE SERVED BUT ALSO THE TRUE SON OF GOD, APPOINTED TO HIS OFFICE OF HIGH PRIEST BY THE FATHER BEFORE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD. THE QUOTATIONS IN OUR TEXT FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT SHOW THAT GOD THE FATHER CHOSE JESUS TO SERVE HIM AS PRIEST IN A WAY SIMILAR TO THAT OF MELCHIZEDEK, THE PRIEST AND KING OF SALEM. AS MELCHIZEDEK SIMPLY APPEARS IN THE BIBLICAL

NARRATIVE TO SERVE ABRAHAM AS GOD'S PRIEST, WITH NO
PREDECESSORS AND NO SUCCESSORS, SO JESUS APPEARS IN HUMAN
FORM, WITHOUT BEGINNING AND END BUT AS THE ETERNAL SON OF
GOD, TO SERVE AS HUMANITY'S GREAT HIGH PRIEST. ONCE
CHRIST'S SACRIFICE WAS COMPLETED, IT STANDS FOREVER.

BEFORE OFFERING HIS LIFE ON THE CROSS AS THE
ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD, JESUS
PRAYED IN THE GARDEN THREE TIMES, "MY FATHER, IF IT BE
POSSIBLE, LET THIS CUP PASS FROM ME; NEVERTHELESS, NOT AS I
WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL" (MT 26:39). MANY CHRISTIANS HAVE
PUZZLED OVER THE MEANING OF THIS PHRASE, AS THOUGH CHRIST
WAS PONDERING THE THOUGHT OF GIVING UP. RATHER, IN A WAY
IT'S LIKE THE MOUNTAIN CLIMBER WHO, HALF-WAY UP THE
MOUNTAIN, PRAYS NOT THAT HE COULD GET OFF THE MOUNTAIN AS
SOON AS POSSIBLE BUT RATHER THAT HE MIGHT SAFELY REACH THE
GOAL OF HIS CLIMB, THE SUMMIT. ALTHOUGH THE BITTER PAIN
AND AGONY HE FACED WERE NOT BEYOND HUMAN COMPREHENSION, THE
PLAN WAS NOT BEYOND HIS WILL TO FULFILL EITHER, AS HE
PRAYED, "NOT AS I WILL, BUT AS YOU WILL" (MT 26:39). THE
GOAL OF BRINGING SALVATION TO THE WORLD THROUGH HIS PERFECT
SACRIFICE WOULD BE ACHIEVED. JESUS WAS TRULY THE "LAMB OF
GOD, WHO TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD" (JN 1:29), AS
JOHN THE BAPTIZER CALLED HIM. JESUS WAS THE PERFECT HIGH

PRIEST BECAUSE HE OFFERED THE PERFECT SACRIFICE FOR THE SINS OF THE WORLD.

BY OFFERING THE PERFECT SACRIFICE, JESUS ACCOMPLISHED THE PERFECT SALVATION, WHICH IS OURS BY FAITH. WHEN HE LEFT THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE, HE FAITHFULLY WALKED THE WAY OF SORROWS ALL THE WAY TO THE JOY OF OUR SALVATION. THE WRITER TO THE HEBREWS ENCOURAGES US TO LOOK TO JESUS, "THE FOUNDER AND PERFECTER OF OUR FAITH, WHO FOR THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM ENDURED THE CROSS, DESPISING THE SHAME" (12:2). THAT PERFECT SALVATION IS FURTHER EXPLAINED IN OUR TEXT: "ALTHOUGH HE WAS A SON, HE LEARNED OBEDIENCE THROUGH WHAT HE SUFFERED. AND BEING MADE PERFECT, HE BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION TO ALL WHO OBEY HIM" (VV 8-9).

JESUS COMPLETED PERFECTLY THE WORK HE HAD COME TO DO. EVERY PROPHECY WAS FULFILLED, AND EVERY BITTER DROP FROM THE CUP OF SUFFERING WAS SWALLOWED. NOTHING REMAINED TO BE ACCOMPLISHED IN ORDER FOR SALVATION TO BE WON FOR HUMANKIND. HIS TASK WAS COMPLETE. ON THE CROSS HE COULD DECLARE IN TRIUMPH, "IT IS FINISHED" (JN 19:30). HE HAD COME "NOT TO BE SERVED BUT TO SERVE, AND TO GIVE HIS LIFE AS A RANSOM FOR MANY" (MK 10:45). HE HAD WON THE VICTORY.

THE VICTORY IS OURS THROUGH FAITH IN OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST. JESUS WAS NOT JUST A MODEL TO FOLLOW, BUT A PERFECT SAVIOR, WHO COMPLETELY TOOK OUR PLACE. ONE SUMMER

A YOUNG BOY WAS TAKING SWIMMING LESSONS, AND AS A FINAL TEST, HE GOING TO HAVE TO SWIM THE LENGTH OF THE POOL. HE HAD A FRIEND WHO ALREADY KNEW HOW TO SWIM AND SHOWED HIM HOW BY DEMONSTRATING THE STROKES TO USE AND THE WAY TO BREATHE. THE BOY ASKED, "WHY DON'T YOU TAKE THE TEST FOR ME, YOU DO IT SO WELL," BUT HIS FRIEND REPLIED, "I CAN'T. YOU HAVE TO DO IT YOURSELF. JUST DO IT LIKE I DID."

WHAT A BLESSING IT IS FOR US THAT JESUS, OUR FRIEND, DOESN'T SAY, "I CAN'T DO IT FOR YOU. YOU HAVE TO SAVE YOURSELF. JUST DO IT LIKE I DID." JESUS IS NOT OUR MODEL; HE IS OUR SAVIOR. THE BIBLE DECLARES THAT JESUS IS THE *MERCY SEAT* "FOR OUR SINS, AND NOT FOR OURS ONLY BUT ALSO FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD" (1 JN 2:2). AS OUR HIGH PRIEST, JESUS CAME TO OFFER THE PERFECT SACRIFICE—HIMSELF—ON THE TREE OF THE CROSS. THE RESULT IS PERFECT SALVATION FOR THE SINS OF THE WHOLE WORLD.

DEAR FRIENDS IN CHRIST, JESUS IS THE BEST HIGH PRIEST THERE COULD EVER BE. HE NOT ONLY MADE INTERCESSION FOR YOU AND ME AND ALL PEOPLE DURING HIS EARTHLY LIFE, BUT HE ALSO OFFERED UP HIS OWN BODY AND SHED OWN HIS BLOOD ON THE CROSS AS THE ONLY ACCEPTABLE SACRIFICE FOR OUR SALVATION. INDEED, THROUGH HIS PERFECT SACRIFICE UPON THE CROSS, JESUS BECAME THE SOURCE OF ETERNAL SALVATION FOR ALL PEOPLE. EVEN THOUGH PEOPLE ARE CONSTANTLY TRYING TO OUTDO ONE

ANOTHER, NO ONE CAN EVER OUTDO GOD'S SOURCE OF ETERNAL
SALVATION. FOR WHEN IT COMES TO RECEIVING THE FORGIVENESS OF
SINS, LIFE, AND SALVATION, THERE'S NO BETTER SOURCE THAN
JESUS, OUR PERFECT HIGH PRIEST. AMEN.