

As Christians, we all have our favorite ways of referring to Jesus. What's yours? We often use titles that are both comfortable and comforting: Jesus is our "Savior" and "Redeemer." Jesus is our "Lord" and "God." He's our "Brother" and "Friend," our "King" and "Good Shepherd." Each of these titles highlights a different aspect of our Savior's service and sacrifice for sinners.

But how often do we describe Jesus as our "Priest"? Probably, not very. And that's unfortunate. In today's Epistle, the author of Hebrews sets us straight concerning the priestly service of our Savior. He highlights how Jesus is our *perfect* High Priest. In fact, he mines the title of "priest" for all it's worth and, in the process, he delivers all the comfort and confidence that comes to us from the Christ. Today we ponder the priesthood of Jesus beneath this theme: What a Priest We Have in Jesus!

The author of Hebrews provides us with some helpful history about the high priesthood. Priestly service was a huge part of the Lord's design for the life of His Old Testament people. He specifically selected the sons of Aaron, Moses' brother, to provide this priestly service for His people. They served on behalf of their fellow Israelites. Regularly they offered gifts and sacrifices to God—both for the sins of the people and for their own sin. God himself appointed them for this priestly service.

Because the priesthood was reserved for those who were chosen by God, the author of Hebrews tells us that Jesus, too, was appointed to priestly service. Jesus' priestly appointment was made public in a spectacular way at His Baptism. There Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and set apart to serve as our great High Priest. It was there that God declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Mt 3:17).

God appointed Jesus as our great High Priest so that He can serve us and help us. Jesus is tremendously qualified to do this because He's *one* of us—bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, a human man among men. As one of us, Jesus knows. He knows our weaknesses and frailties. In the verses right before today's text, the author of Hebrews spells out the comfort we have in Jesus as our High Priest: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin" (4:15). Jesus willingly accepted our human weaknesses to suffer temptation, hunger, fatigue, sadness, loneliness, rejection, persecution.

Because Jesus knows our every weakness, He deals gently with those under His care who are ignorant and wayward. And that's us, by the way. Quite unlike Jesus, we are *not* without sin. Temptations tangle us up. Sin clings closely to us along every step of the way. We have a habit of straying from our Lord's plans and purposes. We deviate from His desires, always seeking to serve ourselves rather than those around

us.

We can see both our sin **and** the amazing gentleness of Jesus in today's Gospel reading. Picture it: Getting closer and closer to Jerusalem, Jesus had just predicted His death and resurrection. This makes at least three times that Jesus told the disciples He would suffer and die. But rather than pray and prepare for the Lord's Passion, James and John hatched their own plan. They were looking for ways to get ahead. They came to Jesus seeking to sit in glory, longing to get a leg up on the competition, and climbing all over their fellow disciples in a mad dash to the top of the heap, no matter who they had to step on in the process. When the other disciples heard about this power play, they were indignant—angry, triggered—ready to retaliate against the brazen audacity of James and John. As Jesus made His way to Calvary, a civil war was about to erupt among His closest followers. It was more than enough reason to ignite the anger and the wrath of this Rabbi from Nazareth.

But the Rabbi's wrath was not kindled. As a priest, Jesus dealt gently with His wayward disciples. He neither condemned nor condoned their sin. Now, He didn't excuse their conduct, but He did set them straight with measured, **priestly** sympathy. He corrected them lovingly and patiently. He said: "It shall not be so among you" (Mk 10:43). He reminded them of His priestly purpose: "For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45).

Because Jesus is our great High Priest, we have this comfort for ourselves. He deals gently with us. He knows our sins. He knows our ignorance. He knows our weaknesses. He knows our struggles and our sufferings. And Jesus knows these things about us not merely as facts, knowledge, or data; He knows it all as if it was happening to Him. He feels for us and suffers with us precisely because He is a human being—like us in every way yet without sin. Not only does our great High Priest know and feel our weakness, but He alone can do something about it. He alone will offer His life as a ransom for all of us. ***What a priest we have in Jesus!***

One of the biggest surprises about our Savior's priestly service is that it was a learning process for Him. In fact, we could say that Jesus learned to be a priest the **hard** way—through the school of suffering. According to our text, "Although [Jesus] was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered" <sup>(v8)</sup>. As our priest, Jesus was a learner like us. Our Savior was a student in the school of suffering—a divine disciple who learned obedience alongside His human brothers and sisters. Although He is God and could always know everything, Jesus never used His omniscience when it would just serve Himself. He didn't cut corners. He didn't cheat. He didn't jump to the front of the line. Instead, Jesus reverently and prayerfully learned obedience through what He suffered.

When was the last time you tried to learn something new and difficult? Perhaps

you downloaded an app to help you learn a new language. Maybe you watched hours of YouTube videos to learn for yourself how to do a major home improvement project. Perhaps you downloaded a complicated recipe so you might sauté your way to success with a new culinary creation in the kitchen. Whatever you've attempted to learn, how did it go for you? Were you successful in the end? Or did you bite off more than you could chew? Maybe what you actually learned was that complicated work is sometimes best left to the experts.

Jesus learned to be your priest in the most difficult way imaginable. He learned through what He suffered. Tears would be His teacher. Pain would be His principal. But neither nails nor thorns would keep Him from learning to be our perfect priest. No pain, no gain. Where others would falter and fail, Jesus pressed on. Today's text points us back to the Garden of Gethsemane. There Jesus prayed as our perfect priest. There He "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" (v 7). Those perfect, priestly prayers continued even as Jesus suffered for our salvation on the cross: "Father, forgive them." "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (cf Lk 23:34, 46; Mt 27:46).

Those perfect prayers were an expression of our Lord's perfect obedience to His Father. Through the school of suffering, Jesus "became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him" (v 9). Only this reverent priest, Jesus, has secured our salvation. What He suffered was on account of **our** sin. The pain He endured was a penalty meant for **us**. The death He died was the necessary ransom to redeem a world of sinful, wayward rebels. Because of His reverence-His perfect, prayerful obedience—His Father raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in glory, where Jesus continues to intercede for us as our great High Priest. Our salvation is found in no one else. ***What a priest we have in Jesus!***

There's one final surprise concerning the priestly work of Jesus. He actually invites us to **share** in **His** priestly work. We're **also** priests-priests of the perfect priest, called to present our bodies "as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship, as St. Paul says in Romans 12:1. As God's baptized and holy people, we have priestly prayers to offer and priestly service to render to those around us. And as priests of the perfect Priest, we too are ongoing students in the school of suffering, following in the footsteps of our great High Priest. When we seek to **be** served, we sin. When we fail to pray for others, we sin. But our Lord's perfect, priestly **service** counts for us. His **obedience** counts for us. He invites us to learn obedience as we follow Him. He promises to perfect our lives through His perfect forgiveness and love. He truly is the source of eternal salvation. ***What a priest we have in Jesus! Amen.***