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"CALLED OF GOD, AS WAS AARON"

– JUNE 28. – HEBREWS 4:14-5:10. –

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."
– LUKE 19:10.

TODAY'S LESSON deals with the Priesthood of Jesus and, incidentally, with the priesthood of His Church. He is the High Priest, or Chief Priest, of our profession, or order, writes the Apostle. The Jews found it difficult to understand how Jesus could in any sense of the word be associated with the priesthood. The Lord God had confined the priestly office to the family of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi. Jesus did not belong to that tribe, nor did His disciples. How could He fill or have to do with the priestly office?

The necessity for discussing the question arose from the fact that, as St. Peter had pointed out, the Church is a Royal Priesthood. So St. Paul shows that as the antitypical Priest, Jesus had offered up Himself as the antitypical Bullock for sin atonement; and that after so doing He had ascended up on High and thus entered the antitypical Holy of Holies, appearing there on our behalf – on behalf of His Church, the antitypical Levites, the antitypical under-priests.

St. Paul argues that because we can by faith recognize Jesus as our great High Priest in Heaven and know that He has sympathy for our imperfections, therefore we may come to Him with great courage, when overtaken by a fault, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in every time of need. But all these blessed assurances will be without force unless we can realize that Jesus is our High Priest in Heaven. Hence the Apostle's argument in this lesson is a demonstration of this fact.

AARONIC PRIESTS WERE TYPICAL

The Apostle reasons (5:1) that all the Jewish priests were taken from amongst their fellows and especially ordained, or set apart, for their work, to represent their people before God, offering for them both their gifts and their sacrifices for sins. In this arrangement the priests were able to sympathize with the people, because they were subject to the same weaknesses, and also had need of the forgiveness of their own sins. But even amongst these imperfect, blemished, sinful priests, who needed to make offerings for their own sins, none was allowed to take this office of himself. God must call him to the office. Thus it was with Aaron. God called him to be the head priest.

So, the Apostle points out, it must be with the antitypical priests on a higher plane. Christ, the High Priest spiritual, and His elect Church, the Royal Priesthood on the spirit plan, must also be called of God. They could not assume the office otherwise. "Christ did not glorify Himself to make Himself a High Priest." God honored Him in this way, however, saying to Him in the prophecy of the Psalms, "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee"; and again, "Thou art a Priest forever after the Order of Melchizedek." – Psalms 2:7; 110:4.

MELCHIZEDEK A ROYAL PRIEST

On this broad foundation of the Divine call the Apostle declares that Christ is not a priest after the order of Aaron – a Jewish priest, an earthly priest; but, although typified by Aaron in respect to an earthly sacrifice, He is really a glorified Priest, not after the Order of Aaron, who was never glorified, never a king, but after the Order of Melchizedek, who was a king and a priest at the same time – not a sacrificing priest, but a reigning priest.

So Christ in glory is not a man, not an earthly being, not the sacrificing One, as before. He is the glorified Kingly Priest, in power and great glory now as the King of saints, able and willing to succor

them in all their trials and difficulties. And by and by, after He shall have accepted all of His under-priests – after He shall have changed them to His own glorious likeness in the First Resurrection, beyond the veil – then He will become the King and Priest in glory to the world, and for a thousand years will reign to bless and to uplift all the willing and obedient who, under the enlightenment then afforded, will draw nigh unto God.

"IN THE DAYS OF HIS FLESH"

Coming back to his argument, the Apostle shows us the connection between the glorified Kingly Priest beyond [R5472 : page 170] the veil and the suffering Jesus in the flesh. (5:7.) When the Apostle writes, "Who in the days of His flesh," we are to understand that the days of His flesh are past, ended. As the Apostle Peter elsewhere explains, "He was put to death in flesh, but quickened in spirit" – in His resurrection. But in the days of His flesh Jesus offered up strong cryings and tears. The Apostle seeks to give us, as the followers of Jesus, confidence in His ability to sympathize with us in all of our troubles. Therefore he reminds us that Jesus "in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto Him that was able to save Him out of death, was heard in respect to that thing which He feared."

Our minds instinctively go back to the Master's experiences in Gethsemane – his prayers to God, His tears, His agony, and according to one account, His bloody sweat. The Apostle's thought, his suggestion, is that the Master who had Himself passed through such trying and bitter experiences, and who is now in Heavenly glory and power, will surely sympathize with and succor all of His true followers, even though He may allow them to have Gethsemane experiences and buffetings of the Adversary.

AS A SON – NOT AS A SINNER

The sufferings of Jesus, the Apostle points out, came not to Him because He was a sinner, but because He was a Son and because as a Son the Heavenly Father would prove, test, His loyalty unto death, even the death of the cross. Only by such a test of loyalty could He be deemed worthy of the high exaltation designed for Him and promised – glory, honor and immortality, Divine nature. The things which He suffered, the things which He endured, not only were to constitute a sacrifice for human sin and to make possible human restitution through the Messianic Kingdom, but those same trials, difficulties and experiences were necessary to the Master Himself. As the Apostle proceeds to say, He was made perfect through sufferings.

Jesus was not imperfect at any time in the sense of being sinful. He was perfect, undefiled, in His glorious condition as the Logos, before He left the glory which He had with the Father and was made flesh. When born of Mary, the assurance given us is that He was still "holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners." His sufferings, therefore, did not make Him perfect in the sense of making Him sinless. The perfecting was of another kind.

Our Lord had entered into a Covenant of Sacrifice – to prove Himself loyal to the Father's will, even unto death. He had the promise of perfection on the highest plane – the promise of the Divine nature – as a reward, if He would fulfil His Covenant of Sacrifice faithfully, loyally. The beginning of that new nature was granted to Him at the time of His baptism, when He was begotten of the Holy Spirit. But the new nature begotten there needed development, or perfecting; and it was for this purpose that the trials, difficulties and buffetings were permitted to come to Him. He was made perfect as a New Creature of the Divine order, or nature, by the things which He suffered.

SAVING HIM FROM DEATH

In the Master's case, after He had entered into a Covenant of Sacrifice, it was a matter of either life or death. His obedience to the Covenant of Sacrifice would bring Him the life immortal, Divine. But any failure would cost Him His all; for His all was staked in that Covenant of Sacrifice. Hence in the Garden of Gethsemane His strong crying and tears were not caused by timidity in respect to the impending crucifixion, or by anything that man might do unto Him. They were not caused by doubt respecting the Divine power or the Divine faithfulness. The Master's fear was of death – lest He should have failed to comply fully with all of the Divine requirements, and should thus lose all in death, and not be accounted worthy of a resurrection.

The Apostle says, "He was heard in respect to the thing which He feared." He was delivered from the fear of death. From that moment onward the Master was the calmest of the calm, in all the trials and stress of that night and the following day. We cannot doubt that the [R5473 : page 170] Father assured Him that all was well – that thus far He had proven Himself faithful.

LEADER AND HIGH PRIEST

On the basis of His own victory and exaltation Jesus is now "the Author of eternal salvation unto all that obey Him," says the Apostle. – 5:9.

The first salvation which this antitypical Priest after the Order of Melchizedek effects is the salvation of His Church, a Little Flock, a Royal Priesthood, a Holy Nation. These are to be saved to the same glorious station which He Himself has attained. Nor can they reach that station by any other road than that which He traveled. Hence His invitation to them is that they take up their cross and follow Him; that they walk in His footsteps through evil report, through good report, faithful unto death, as He was.

Not that it is possible for any of His followers to overcome in the same absolute sense that He did; for He was perfect in the flesh, and His followers are all imperfect through the fall. What is required of His followers is that they demonstrate the same heart loyalty that He manifested – the same willingness to do the Father's will and to sacrifice every other interest. For these the great High Priest appropriates the merit of His sacrifice, imputing it to His followers as a covering for all their unintentional blemishes and shortcomings. Thus they are assured that they may stand complete in Him in the Father's sight, and by and by in the glorious First Resurrection be made actually perfect by that glorious consummation – "changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye"; for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom."

But in order to attain this position, all of the followers of Jesus must obey Him, must follow His directions. Then He will succor them and guide them to the Heavenly Kingdom. "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."

Additionally, He will be the Author of salvation to as many of mankind as will obey Him when He takes over the Kingdom, the dominion of the world, during the thousand years of His Messianic Reign. All who then refuse to obey Him will be destroyed in the Second Death; but all the willing and obedient will ultimately be perfected as human beings, earthly beings – restored to the perfection in which God created Father Adam, plus valuable experience in connection with sin and recovery from it.

"Tell the whole world these blessed tidings;
Speak of the time of rest that nears;
Tell the oppressed of every nation,
Jubilee lasts a thousand years.

"What if the clouds do for a moment

Hide the blue sky where morn appears?
Soon the glad sun of promise given
Rises to shine a thousand years.

"Haste ye along, ages of glory;
Haste the glad time when Christ appears.
O! that I may be one found worthy
To reign with him a thousand years!"

