

Hebrews 5:1-10

For 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. 2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. 3 Because of this he is obligated to offer sacrifice for his own sins just as he does for those of the people. 4 And no one takes this honor for himself, but only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

*“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;*

6 as he says also in another place,

*“You are a priest forever,
after the order of Melchizedek.”*

7 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.

8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered. 9 And being made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, 10 being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek.

High priest after high priest had made intercession for Israel, offered sacrifices upon the altars of the temple, and taught the people the law of God. Each of them, if they examined themselves sincerely, knew like pastors today that they were no less sinful than the people for whom and to whom they ministered. They were sinners acting on behalf of men in relation to God. And so, because they knew their own weakness, they were able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward.

But what about Christ? He was God Himself. He had no sin. Could He possibly understand our weakness, what it is to live in a fallen world as a member of a fallen race? Would He deal gently with His ignorant and wayward people, or would He, unable to identify with the frailty of their fleshly existence, grow impatient, throw up His hands in exasperation and in the towel in frustration?

The writer to the Hebrews answers clearly, “No.” Christ became a priest for us. He became our Mediator between God and man. As we see so explicitly in the history of His suffering and death that we’ve been pondering in Lenten Vespers, He Himself, though God, offered up prayers and supplications with loud cries and tears. He prayed to Him who was able to save Him from death. He did not feign our weakness. He knew it. He did not pretend to be one of us. He was. He learned obedience through suffering. He was, as we heard in the fourth chapter, tempted in every way, yet without sin. And in this way, offering the perfect gift and sacrifice upon Golgotha, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him, to all who have the obedience of faith.

Christ does not expect of you what He does not and will not give you. He knows your weakness and need. He has experienced it. And so when He says, “Believe,” He works faith by His Spirit through His Word. When He says, “Obey,” He speaks to your hearts which He has made temples of God. When He says “Come to me,” He has prepared the path for you. He is meek and gentle, not wanting to scare the fretful soul away. He is patient, not begrudging the anxious soul his or her trepidation, Himself keenly aware of what it is to carry heavy weights upon His shoulders. He is a priest in the line of Melchizedek, the king of peace, who blessed

Abraham. He is the Prince of Peace and the source of our peace, the forgiveness of sins, who tenderly blessed the littlest of children and whose arms spread out in benediction for each of us on the accursed tree to which His love held Him. Turn to Him, then, without fear or hesitation, in every need and for your redemption, knowing that, like those high priests before Him, He is able to sympathize with your frailty, and yet that, unlike them, His sacrifice for your sin has been complete, perfect, and sufficient.