

## CHRISTIAN FUNERAL OF OUR BROTHER ROBERT KUTSCH, FALLEN ASLEEP IN CHRIST

### Hebrews 4:9-10, 14-16

*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, [10] for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. [14] Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. [15] 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. [16] Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

His loved ones stood at his side. How long would it take? Those who had seen a man die like this before guessed, but no one could be sure. You could see the effort in every breath. His eyes were opened, but how well could he see? At times, he would summon his energy and speak, but he did not say much. Finally, he died. What would happen now? Who would take the body? Where would he be buried? Would there be a tombstone? If so, what would it say? What preparations had to be made, and who was going to make them? One way or another, things got done. A grave was found. The body was prepped for burial. Soon, the body was buried, but the sadness was not. Then the thoughts came. “What could I have done differently to keep him alive?” “Why did this happen now?” “How much did he suffer?” “Did he know how much I love him?” “What do we do now?” Then came Easter.

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Bob has not gone through anything that his Lord did not go through first. Bob has not gone anywhere that his high priest did not go first. Rather, with confidence Bob has drawn near to the throne of grace to find mercy and grace in time of need. Bob found a sympathetic ear in his suffering, as the Spirit groaned in prayer when Bob could not, because the one who answers prayer, Jesus Christ, is the one who himself suffered, and not only suffered, but suffered for Bob, and for you.

The high priest was the central figure in the Old Testament sacrificial system. He was the chief mediator between God and man, offering sacrifice for sin and pleading for mercy, not only for his flock, but for himself. He too was a sinner, yet he was called into a holy office. How difficult this must have been! Imagine every day waking up, knowing you would be offering sanctified vessels to the Holy One, using your own filthy, sinful hands to do so. Imagine every day waking up knowing you would be pleading for the forgiveness of your people, using your own filthy, sinful mouth to do so. This was no easy task, and it was a tireless one. Every day sacrifices were required. Every day the ceremonies were repeated, because every day sin abounded. The whole system was a constant preaching of the law, declaring the unquenchable hunger of the wrath of God, presenting the ugliness of sin in a temple filled with the death cries of innocent beasts offered to God in sacrifice. There was no rest, and the pious priests and people would most definitely be weary.

Yet a new high priest was coming, and he spoke words of mercy and comfort: “*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*” (Matthew 11:28). Rest—to the soul incessantly working for redemption, could there be a sweeter word than this? “*So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his.*” Rest—but how could this be. What happened to sin? What happened to the unquenchable fury of the wrath of God? What happened to the terrifying cries of death that filled God’s temple? Our great high priest, Jesus Christ, came. That is what happened. The writer to the Hebrews later explains:

*For it was indeed fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, innocent, unstained, separated from sinners, and exalted above the heavens. He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:23-28)*

Christ has offered himself, perfect, innocent, unblemished, and precious to God, as the sacrifice for sin once for all. Thus, he could yell, *"It is finished."* And it is finished. We do not gather to pray for Bob today. Bob does not need our prayers. We do not gather to beg Bob into heaven today. Bob has been promised heaven already, and God's promise is unbreakable. We do not gather to remember Bob as if he is no longer with us today. Bob is still with us, on the other side of the altar now, celebrating the presence of the Lord with us every time we celebrate Holy Communion. Bob is a part of the communion of saints. Bob is a part of the holy Christian Church. He has merely transferred to a better pastor. Bob is at rest, because where once the blood of lambs and bulls spilled over, now God's mercy has overflowed, coming with the body and blood of our great high priest, sacrificed for our sins and given to his church for the assurance of God's forgiveness.

You are not the first to gather around a dying family member or friend. You are not the first to weep at your loss. Jesus himself wept at Lazarus' death, even though he would soon raise him again to life. You are not the first to wonder, to ask questions, to ask why. Our Lord himself called from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Faith can and will ask such questions, but faith will also trust in the wisdom in God's answer. Christ's "why" was answered with the resurrection and with the birth of the Church, which partakes of the new life Easter brings. Our "why" is never as powerful as God's "because," even when God's "because" is hidden at times.

*"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."* There is nothing you will experience today and in the days to come that our Lord cannot identify with, because in becoming man he was born into our sorrows, our suffering, and our struggle with God's plans. He too begged God in Gethsemane, *"If there is another way..."* Sometimes there is no other way, because God's mercy demands free reign. God's mercy reigns today. God's grace is on display. Bob is at rest. He was baptized for this rest. He was fed Christ's body and blood for this rest. He was taught by God himself through the Word for this rest. He was absolved over and over again, cleansed of his sin, freed from the wrath of God, for this rest. God's mercy had its way, even though we may not have had our own. Who can stop God's mercy? Satan and death itself could not stop it on Calvary. Bob's death surely couldn't stop it either.

Let us not spend more time considering Bob's departure today than awaiting our reunion. For a brief time, we have been separated. For an eternity, we will be reunited. In sorrow, we mourn his death. In joy, we celebrate his life, not as an unbeliever celebrates a dead man's life in the past, but as a Christian celebrates the faithful's new life with Christ. Let us not focus on what we could have done, but on what Christ has done, giving himself for Bob's sins, giving himself for our sins, once for all. Let us approach the throne of grace, and leave our sins, our doubts, our second guesses at Christ's feet, and receive mercy and find grace to help us in this our time of need and to lead us to the same rest from our labors that Bob has entered this week. It has pleased God to take our brother home. Let it please us as well. For what pleases God is what profits his people. You are his people. Our brother is at rest. May we find rest in Christ as well, and we will, *"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."* *"Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession."* Amen.