

1. Blessed St. Patrick's Day
2. Rome / Italy

Lent V

Epistle:
Hebrews 5:5-10

⁵ So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him,
'You are my Son,
today I have begotten you';
⁶as he says also in another place,
'You are a priest for ever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.'

⁷ In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

We've got a couple of things going on today in our Epistle reading (somehow Lent has become reflections from the Epistles—can't resist). The first thing to say is that the Bible is but one story. Which won't make a ton of sense until you read passages like Ephesians. It has very much felt like two stories to so many, but this is the great gift of Paul—Paul is conducting one great wedding in his letters: the wedding of the Old and New Testament. This is significant, because when two become one, things get better! Children are example, are they not? Nate and Sarah became one, and because of that I now have six reasons to love her all the more. Things get better when two become one. So thank you, Paul.

In this passage, Paul quotes a couple of verses in Psalms. It just so happens that the passages he quotes are quoting yet another book—Genesis. So in a single letter of Scripture, we get two other books of Scripture, creating one coherent story. It's remarkable, really. This is how the whole thing works.

So let's start with Genesis, so that we can make sense of Psalms and Ephesians, for the glorification of Christ and edification of his church ~~in the~~.

Melchizedek. When the called nomad and father of a nation Abraham passed through Salem (future Jerusalem), the Priest-King came out to greet him. The King is almost mythical when described—we know not of his origins, but he's clearly a historical figure with mythical reputation. He bears not only bread and wine and gets three verses of the Bible. He's so moved by this new victory "king" Abraham, that he says, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth.

²⁰ And praise be to God Most High,
who delivered your enemies into your hand."

1) picta
↳ Duomo
2) Deposito
... of
course
one
leading
to
the
other

Abraham then gives Salem a 10th of all that he has. The first tithe, so to speak. So why is the Bible weirdly wrapped around a guy who gets 3 verses? Because he's a type of Christ. What other mythical King comes to us from his beautiful City to give us bread and wine and then blesses us with his words? Jesus. And what do we do in response for his outpouring of love? We give a love offering in response that he then uses to bless the whole world.

So now we can make sense of Psalms. David is also a type of Christ. He is begotten by adoption—David is. Jesus is begotten by nature—by Divine spiration! Intrinsic to God is a begetting of the Son!

Blah, blah. What's the point Paul is driving home? The whole Bible is about Jesus. From Genesis to the poets. All is Jesus.

That's why Paul said the following: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. ⁸Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; ⁹and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, ¹⁰having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek."

This is remarkable. Abraham needed a priest. We need a priest. Jesus is that priest. What kind of priest do we need? Not a slick one. We don't need him to win American idol. Do you need a Jesus who high fives you on your best day? Maybe. He certainly does. Do you need a Jesus who fully identifies with the worst parts of your life? Much more likely. Well, Paul tells us that he had to pray with loud cries and tears. Sound familiar to your own experience? Paul also tells us that he did so with reverent submission. He's not calling us to anything he hasn't done himself. Paul then tells us that he had to learn obedience in the midst of suffering. Ouch. I doubt I'll cuss you out the day I win the lottery. I might cuss you out the day I get fired and forfeit my home. Jesus blessed his Father in BOTH circumstances. He learned obedience through suffering. This is weird. How does a perfect person become "perfect through suffering" How is perfection further perfected????? That's weird. I would say that this is not talking about his moral perfections, but rather his status as a 'perfect' candidate. Someone who has never suffered is not the perfect person for identifying with suffering!! I have probably seen this play most in my churches with widows. Nothing can comfort a new widow like an army of widows who have weathered that storm.

So here it is: This lent, you do not bow the knee before a King who has no idea what you're talking about! You bow the knee before one whose flesh was torn from his body for sins he did not himself commit??? Do you feel the injustice of this world? So did he. Do you feel the radical unfair nature of suffering for which you did not sign up? So did he. And the proof is at this altar. Worship him. Melchezidek is here! He brings bread and wine. HE suffers with you. HE heals you.

there
is
an
obedience
with
suffering
unlike
to
God
together
(quote
Jack
Gilbert
poem)

They risk delight



Poems

A Brief for the Defense

BY JACK GILBERT

Sorrow everywhere. Slaughter everywhere. If babies are not starving someplace, they are starving somewhere else. With flies in their nostrils. But we enjoy our lives because that's what God wants. Otherwise the mornings before summer dawn would not be made so fine. The Bengal tiger would not be fashioned so miraculously well. The poor women at the fountain are laughing together between the suffering they have known and the awfulness in their future, smiling and laughing while somebody in the village is very sick. There is laughter every day in the terrible streets of Calcutta, and the women laugh in the cages of Bombay. If we deny our happiness, resist our satisfaction, we lessen the importance of their deprivation.

We must risk delight. We can do without pleasure, but not delight. Not enjoyment. We must have the stubbornness to accept our gladness in the ruthless furnace of this world. To make injustice the only measure of our attention is to praise the Devil. If the locomotive of the Lord runs us down, we should give thanks that the end had magnitude.

We must admit there will be music despite everything.

We stand at the prow again of a small ship
anchored late at night in the tiny port
looking over to the sleeping island: the waterfront
is three shuttered cafés and one naked light burning.
To hear the faint sound of oars in the silence as a rowboat
comes slowly out and then goes back is truly worth
all the years of sorrow that are to come.

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