

Take-Home: Session 4

A Kingdom of Priests · A High Priest Able to Sympathize

What We Found

We crossed into the New Testament and met the Priest. Hebrews says the Son was "made like his brethren in every respect" so that he might become "a merciful and faithful high priest" (Hebrews 2:17): the Incarnation grounds his solidarity with us, and the Father's own word confers the office (Hebrews 5:5 to 6). He was tempted in every respect as we are, yet without sin, and because of him the invitation stands with no fine print: "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16), every believer: an access the Church affirms wholeheartedly, alongside and never against the ministry Christ instituted. He did not seize the office; "one does not take the honor upon himself" (Hebrews 5:4), a rule Israel learned through Korah's rebellion and Aaron's staff that budded overnight: priesthood is conferred by God, never self-claimed. The Father appointed the Son with words we already had memorized: "You are a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." And behind Hebrews 5:7, "loud cries and tears," we heard Gethsemane, as the Church's tradition has, and our high priest on the ground, consenting to the cup for our sake. Sympathy was purchased at full price.

Voices of the Church

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Gregory of Nazianzus

"What has not been assumed has not been healed." Whatever the priest does not share, he cannot carry to God. Our whole humanity, body, mind, fear, and tears, went into the sanctuary with him.

Letter 101, to Cledonius

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Augustine

"He is the priest who offers, and he is himself the offering." At the altar of the cross, priest and victim are the same person. Every son of Aaron offered blood not his own, first for his own sins. This priest has no sins of his own, and the blood is his.

City of God, Book 10, chapter 20

VOICE OF THE CHURCH St. Leo the Great

In his celebrated Tome, received at the Council of Chalcedon, St. Leo teaches that in the one Christ each nature performs what is proper to it in communion with the other: one person, truly God and truly man. That is the deep grammar of our high priest, and why his single offering can carry every human being in it. (A faithful summary of the Tome.)

Letter to Flavian (the Tome), received at the Council of Chalcedon

Live It This Week

- Once a day, pray one sentence of raw honesty at the throne of grace: the thing you actually feel, not the thing you think God prefers to hear. Hebrews 4:16 is your warrant.
- Read Matthew 26:36 to 46 once this week at night, slowly, as the prayer of your high priest for you.
- When temptation hits this week, pray Hebrews 2:18 in your own words: "You were tempted. Help me now."

Memory Verse

"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."

Hebrews 4:16 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Hebrews chapter 7, slowly, once. You have already met everything in it.

Catechism References

CCC 1544 to 1545; CCC 612.