

## A High Priest Like Melchizedek (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

### Hebrews 5:1-6—A High Priest Like Melchizedek

<sup>1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And one does not take the honor upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was. <sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him, “Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee”; <sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place, “Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” (Hebrews 5:1-6)

1. High Priest: acts “on behalf of men in relation to God” (5:1)
2. Sacrifices: “to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin” (5:1)
3. Sympathy: “he can deal gently...,” because he “himself is beset with weakness” (5:2)
4. Vocation: “called” (Greek *kaleō*; Latin *vocatur*) by God (5:4)
5. Quotation from Jewish Scripture (Psalm 2:7; Psalm 110:4)

### 6. The High Priest Melchizedek:

And Melchizedek king of Salem [= Jerusalem] brought out bread and wine; he was priest (Hebrew *kōhen*) of God Most High. And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything. (Genesis 14:18-20; cf. Psalm 76:1-2)

In Judah God is known,  
his name is great in Israel.  
His abode has been established in Salem,  
his dwelling place in Zion. (Psalm 76:1-2)

### Living Tradition: The Roman Canon (ca. 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D.)

St. Ambrose of Milan (4<sup>th</sup> century A.D.):

And we beg and pray that you might take this oblation by the hands of your angels to your altar on high, just as you accepted the offerings of your righteous child, Abel, the sacrifice of our patriarch, Abraham, and *that which the high priest, Melchizedek, offered.* (Ambrose of Milan, *On the Sacraments*, 5:21; trans. John Baldovin)

Eucharistic Prayer I (= Roman Canon):

Be pleased to look upon these offerings with a serene and kindly countenance, and to accept them, as once you were pleased to accept the gifts of your servant Abel the just,

the sacrifice of Abraham, our father in faith, and *the offering of your high priest Melchizedek* (Latin *summus sacerdos tuus Melchisedech*), a holy sacrifice, a spotless victim. (Roman Canon, identical in 1962 Missal of John XXIII [Extraordinary Form] and 1970 Missal of Paul VI [Ordinary Form])

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection (30<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. How is Jesus a “high priest” according to “the order of Melchizedek”? Why is this important for understanding the mystery of the Eucharist?

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### For Further Reading

1. St. Thomas Aquinas. *Commentary on the Letter of Saint Paul to the Hebrews*. Trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P. Lander, Wyo.: Aquinas Institute, 2012.
2. Mary Healy. *Hebrews*. Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2016.
3. Erik M. Heen and Philip D. W. Krey, eds. *Hebrews*. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, New Testament X. Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005.
4. Edward Foley, ed., *A Commentary on the Order of Mass of the Roman Missal*. Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2011.