

A High Priest Forever (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

Hebrews 7:23-28—A Priest Forever

²³ *The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office;* ²⁴ *but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues for ever.* ²⁵ *Consequently he is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.* ²⁶ *For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens.* ²⁷ *He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself.* ²⁸ *Indeed, 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 for ever. (Hebrews 7:23-28)*

1. Order of Melchizedek:

The LORD has sworn
and will not change his mind,
“*You are a priest for ever
after the order of Melchizedek.*” (Psalm 110:4; cf. Rite of Ordination)

2. Two Priesthoods:

<i>Levitical Priesthood</i>	<i>Christ's Priesthood</i>
Many	One
Temporary	Permanent
(prevented by death)	(risen from the dead)
Sinners	Without Sin
Earthly	Heavenly
Daily Sacrifices (of Animals)	One Sacrifice (of Himself)

3. Sacrifice: “once for all when he offered up himself” (7:27)

The Living Tradition

Catechism: In the ecclesial service of the ordained minister, it is Christ himself who is present to his Church as Head of his Body, Shepherd of his flock, high priest of the redemptive sacrifice, Teacher of Truth. This is what the Church means by saying that the priest, by virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, acts *in persona Christi Capitis*: “It is the same priest, Christ Jesus, whose sacred person his minister truly represents. Now the minister, by reason of the sacerdotal consecration which he has received, is *truly made like to the high priest and possesses the authority to act in the power and place of the*

person of Christ himself (virtute ac persona ipsius Christi).” [Pius XII] Christ is the source of all priesthood: the priest of the old law was a figure of Christ, and *the priest of the new law acts in the person of Christ.* [Thomas Aquinas] (CCC 1548)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)

1. What does it mean when the Church teaches that the priest acts “in the person of Christ”? What is the relationship between the ordained priesthood and the high priesthood of Jesus Christ?

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.