

ORDINARY SUNDAY XXX "B"
OCTOBER 27/28, 2018

For the past three weekends our second reading has been from the New Testament letter to the Hebrews. A main theme of the letter is the author's designation of Jesus as Priest. Given the current crisis of the revelations of the heinous crimes of sexual abuse committed by priests and bishops and the failure of other bishops to respond in ways to safeguard the members of God's flock, the message of Hebrews is timely.

In proclaiming Jesus a priest, the author established a title and role Jesus himself eschewed. It is a unique and original claim, found nowhere else in the New Testament. The Gospels present Jesus as a prophet in the mode of Israel's history, an itinerant preacher, and miracle worker. When it came to Israel's cultic priesthood, centered in the Temple in Jerusalem, the Gospels relate Jesus not only kept his distance, but also directed some of his sharpest criticisms and prophetic actions against it. In the end the anger engendered in the Temple priests, led them and their cohort, with the cooperation of the occupying Roman government, to put Jesus to death on the cross.

Priesthood in all cultures, including the Hebrew Scriptures, concerns the relations between human beings with god, gods, or God for the benefit of both. The priest is one who offers people's sacrifices to God, reveals God's judgments and will, intercedes with God to gain forgiveness for people's sins, and to establish communion between humanity and God. In Israel's history, like in neighboring nations, the office of priesthood was hereditary. For the Jews it was passed down through the male descendants of the family line of Aaron, the brother of Moses, whom God designated as priest and whom, in turn, Moses consecrated in that office.

Unlike the Aaronic priesthood Jesus' priesthood, Hebrews teaches, is founded not on human descent, but in Jesus' nature as the divine Son of God. From the moment of the union of his divine nature with our human nature to the last drop of his blood spilling from his open side on the cross, Jesus' whole life is one priestly act of offering sacrifice, of fulfilling God's will. As such, he offers the ultimate and eternal sacrifice. Jesus is both priest, the one who offers, and victim, that which is offered. This freely willed offering of Jesus heals the wound of our sin,

inherited from Adam achieving ultimate reconciliation with God. Because of the union of divine and human nature in Jesus, in his human nature the author tells us Jesus, while divine is incapable of sin, yet in his human nature is capable of understanding our human weaknesses and temptations, and so is merciful priest. In today's Gospel story of the healing of the blind man, Bartimeaus, we see this mercy and compassion of Jesus demonstrated. Bartimeaus is a symbol of each of us who in various ways are blinded to the love of God in our life through sin and to whom Jesus comes with divine mercy and to whom we, too like Bartimeaus, can approach in faith and without fear for forgiveness and healing.

At the Last Supper on the night before he died, Jesus as priest and victim, established the means by which his one unending sacrifice would continue to remain present and effective in the world until the day when God would bring the work of establishing his kingdom begun in Jesus to completion. At the Last Supper Jesus established the sacraments of the Holy Eucharist in which he united his life and sacrifice with bread and wine, naming them his Body and Blood, and the sacrament of Holy Order through which he commissioned the twelve disciples at the table with him and those whom they would choose as their successors (today known as bishops and priests) to perpetually make present in his name through the Holy Spirit specifically given them for this mission, his life and sacrifice through the celebration of this sacrificial meal and, through which he would continue to exercise his compassionate, healing, merciful presence. Bishops and priests must never forget they have been given this great responsibility. As Pope Francis has stated: Bishops and priests are to "smell like the sheep"; taking on the hopes, fears, wounds of their people and applying the unction of mercy.

In the Rite of Ordination the bishop anoints the hands of the newly ordained priest setting them apart for priestly service reciting the following prayer. I invite you to join in praying them with me for the reconsecration all of the priests in the Church, and especially for me.

The Lord Jesus Christ whom the Father anointed with the Holy Spirit, guard and preserve you that you may sanctify the Christian people and offer sacrifices to God.

