

Our Priesthood Hebrews 5:5-10

Many religious people in the first century after Jesus' birth, both Jews and Gentiles, had questions about the religion of the early Christians. They were looking for evidence that this new faith was genuine. Jews had the miracles of crossing the Red Sea and the agreement made with God at Mount Sinai to support their faith. But what miracles did Christians have? The Jews had beautiful worship ceremonies and a high priest who offered sacrifices in the temple so that the people would be forgiven. But they still didn't understand these Christians. How could this Christian faith, centered in Jesus, offer forgiveness of sins and friendship with God? We ask the same questions today!

This letter to the Hebrews was written to answer exactly these kinds of questions. This letter also tells us how important Jesus really is. Jesus is greater than any prophet, and greater than Moses and Joshua. Jesus is the perfect high priest because he never sinned, and by offering his own life he made the perfect sacrifice for sin once and for all. By his death and return from death he opened the way for all people to come to God.¹

Some of the Jews were asking when and how Jesus was called to the priesthood. The Hebrews' author insisted that Christ began His priestly functions with the appropriate call from God who declared Jesus to be a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek. The writer said that Jesus was and is the Heir of David whose destiny was to rule the nations (Ps. 2:8). He states that Jesus is both the Priest and King. Although Jesus was Priest and King he offered up prayers and petitions, during his ministry and especially at the time of his crucifixion. His

¹ The Promises: Contemporary English Version. Nashville : Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1995, 1394

resurrection furnishes the decisive proof of God's acceptance of Jesus' sacrificial activity.

Although Jesus is the son of God, He experienced the true meaning of obedience in terms of the suffering he endured. Having done so, He was made perfect for the role He played as His people's Captain and High Priest. We can't fully comprehend the Incarnation but he had to experience the human condition. Suffering became a reality that He tasted and from it He can sympathize deeply with His followers then and now.

Whatever our suffering, our High Priest understands it, sympathizes, and makes available the "mercy" and "grace" which are needed to endure it successfully. Christ was designated by God to be High Priest.^{2 3}

This passage sets out three essential qualifications of the priest in any age and in any generation.

(i) A priest is appointed on humans' behalf to deal with the things concerning God.

(ii) The priest must be one with humans, going through human experiences and must be able to sympathize with them and us.

(iii) The third essential of a priest is that no human appoints him or herself to the priesthood; their appointment is of God. The priesthood is not an office which a person takes; it is a privilege and a glory to which one is called. God chose Jesus for the Priesthood. At His Baptism there came to Jesus the voice which said: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" (Psalm 2:7).

The writer leads us to remember Jesus in Gethsemane. That is what he is thinking of when he speaks of Jesus' prayers and entreaties, his tears and his cry.

²Walvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary : An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 2:791

³Wiersbe, Warren W.: *The Bible Exposition Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Victor Books, 1996, c1989, S. Heb 5:3

The rabbis had a saying: “There are three kinds of prayers, each loftier than the preceding-prayer, crying and tears. Prayer is made in silence; crying with raised voice; but tears overcome all things.” Jesus knew even the desperate prayer of tears.

Jesus learned from all his experiences because he met them all with reverence and obedience. The Greek phrase here is “He learned from what he suffered.” What the writer to the Hebrews is saying is that all the experiences of suffering through which Jesus passed perfectly fitted him to become the Savior of humankind.

The salvation which Jesus brought is an eternal salvation. It is something which keeps us safe both in time and in eternity. With Christ those who accept him by faith are safe for ever. There are no circumstances that can pluck us from Christ’s hand.⁴

Peter told us that because of our relationship with Christ, we are his hands and feet in this world. Jesus said greater things we will do. I invite each person in worship to reflect on how Christ has shown Himself to be your High Priest in the past 30 days. (*Linda Holloway shared a story of blessed assurance and divine help for the doctor who assisted Leon in the hospital.*) Amen.

Linda Holloway testimony follows:

WOW GOD DAYS

On Wed., Mar 21 I was reading the Bible, Isaiah 58 and when I got to vs. 6 “Dr. Ella” jumped out at me. I thought of Dr. Ella through the v. 6-11. Who is Dr. Ella?

Dr. Mihaela Sescioreanu (she was Dr. Ella to us) was Leon’s pulmonologist. She cared for him at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland (SJMO) and in office. She isn’t even 5’ tall, is from Romania and she and Leon hit it off from the moment they met. He was so knowledgeable about Romania and so interested in her history—she had walked 10 miles each way to attend medical school, waited a long time to immigrate to the US and had her twin boys after 20 years of marriage.

⁴ Barclay, William, lecturer in the University of Glasgow (Hrsg.): *The Letter to the Hebrews*. Philadelphia : The Westminster Press, 2000, c1975 (The Daily Study Bible Series, Rev. Ed), S. 44

She considered them-and herself-to be miracles. At childbirth she had nearly died and was on a ventilator.

Memorial Day 2011. When Leon stopped breathing at the Grayling Hospital, we wanted him transported to SJMO—but there were no ICU beds available. But then the hospital got a call that a bed had been arranged and the transport helicopter brought him to SJMO. Who was the interventionist doctor in the ICU? Dr. Ella. She was on duty that night and when she had found out that it was Mr. Holloway, she pulled every trick she knew to make a bed for him. And since she had been on a ventilator, she knew what he was experiencing and was that comforting presence for him as he was eased from the ventilator. Later in his hospital stay, she just came by to say Hi to him, at the very time he quit breathing—again—and was his interventionist physician in ICU. They had a real bond.

Thurs., Nov. 17 when Leon was transported by ambulance to the ER at SJMO --Who was in the ER? Dr. Ella. Dr. Ella is not an ER physician. We had never seen her in the ER. Since it was a trauma situation, I wasn't able to find out. Leon was transferred to CCU but never recovered consciousness, passing at 1:44 am on 11/18.

Dec. 30. Jill and I had a meeting with Dr. Ella at her office; the first I had spoken to her since Leon died. I needed closure to know why Leon had died so suddenly, so unexpectedly. I wanted to know what she thought, medically, had happened. I also was curious to know what she was doing in the ER that evening of 11/17.

It was an emotional meeting. She was heartbroken when she came back on duty in the morning and went to check on him; found out that he hadn't made it. She had been on duty in ICU the day before, and was leaving the hospital, at the same time that Leon's ambulance arrived. Three different respiratory therapists called her on her cell phone to tell her that Leon was there and in trouble. She felt compelled to come back to the hospital, called the ER physician for permission, and essentially gave him comfort and her presence.

In our meeting she told Jill and I how fond she was of him—how he reminded her of her own grandfather whom she had loved in Romania. She and Leon had visited and talked privately during his month stay in June and she knew he would never have wanted to be a burden on his family; she knew how much he loved his family and that he had a very deep faith. She asked me if she could keep my picture of him. Whenever she had seen him in the office, she was uplifted from his visits because of his positive attitude and the way he dealt with his illness. She marveled at how peacefully he had passed, without pain and without suffering. She expressed that God's hand was all over the situation—her being there just at that time, getting the phone calls. Her medical opinion aside, she felt that God had simply called Leon home and that he

was ready. She hoped he had met her grandfather in heaven. She said she believed but she “wasn’t very good about being religious—she was supposed to be fasting but she just got so busy with her patients that she told God she was sorry, but she didn’t care about money and her fasting was taking care of these sick people, and she hoped he understood and forgave her.” It was an emotional visit, tears by all three of us, but both Jill and I felt closure and left feeling blessed by the conversation.

Now, this past Wed., 3/21/12, nearly 3 months later,”*is this not the fasting I have chosen*” said Dr. Ella to me. As I thought about it during the day, I felt I should write a note to Dr. Ella and enclose the verses. My note simply said what had happened that morning, that I remembered her comment about fasting, and that God not only understands her, He approves. Told her I was OK and that I hoped the note was what she needed to “perk up her day.” Put in in the mail. I have never sent a note to anyone about the Bible speaking to a situation but I felt strongly that I should do so.

The next day, Thursday, 18 weeks since Leon’s death. The past week were “edge of tears” days—I think it is Spring and the weather—the continual sense of his presence in the flowers—sadness at how much he loved them and Spring—missing him. Thursdays are still the worst day of the week for me. I tend to go over the timeline during the day and all the events surrounding his death; questioning if something had been done differently, would he still be here?

I had lunch with friends and got in the car to go home—then thought I’ll run to Costco today and get gas—doesn’t make much sense since it was out of my way. But I did it. I had planned to run to Costco on Fri. since I would be driving past on my way to Somerset, and like everyone else, I am planning trips to double up and conserve gas.

When I got to Costco, rather than going in the normal entrance, I decided to go to the restroom so I went in the Exit rather than the Entrance. Walking toward me (I wouldn’t likely have even noticed had I not read that verse on Wed.) in a Tshirt & shorts is tiny, Dr. Ella, with pizza in her hands, walking toward a table in the food area. She was with her 4 yr old twins—her miracle babies--and her Mother. I called out to her—both are fast talkers—excitedly hugged. I think at the same time we both said—“*wait till I tell you what happened yesterday!!*”

I asked if she had been to her office? She responded NO—she had come from ICU. Before I could tell her about the note I had sent, she started telling me that yesterday, Wed., driving home she had seen my husband’s face. She couldn’t think of his name—his picture is still on her desk—then she remembered Leon—Mr. Holloway—Leon. She was so excited but didn’t know why—all of a sudden—she saw his face.

I then proceeded to tell her about sending her a note Wed., about reading Isaiah 58 and fasting and reminded her what she had said about her lack of proper fasting and hoping that God understood. She said that it's Easter and she should be fasting—she told God she was going to fast (go meatless) on Wed. since that is the day he saved her and her babies, but she got so busy yesterday with patients that she forgot. She said she told God she was sorry, please forgive me. All the time she is making the sign of the cross and telling me to wait till I hear what happened next when she got home on Wed.

She then proceeded to say But when I got home, my son had fallen in the pond in our back yard—he was hypoxic—a truck driver saw my Mother's panic and stopped—he was a lifeguard and gave him CPR; EMS was on the way, but he wasn't recovered. I think he was gone!! I gave him CPR and just prayed and prayed, GOD, please save my baby. You know how hard I work to save my patients, and that I don't care about money. Please GOD!!!

When EMS got there, he was fine. Thurs. he was sitting there calmly eating his pizza. She hadn't intended to buy them pizza, but changed her mind at the last minute. Both of us saw God's hand in the total situation and our "chance" encounter. We wondered if Leon and her grandfather had teamed up in Heaven to be her guardian angels. Or is Leon the guardian angel of her son? What I came away with is that we are not alone in our grief—God loves us and cares and answers prayers for comfort.