



Daily Reflections

JOURNEYING THROUGH CHALLENGING TIMES

Image by Christine Sponchia from Pixabay

A NEW MELCHIZEDEK

By Father David C. Robinson, SJ

Excerpt from Today's Reading

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that have come to be, passing through the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made by hands, that is, not belonging to this creation, he entered once for all into the sanctuary, not with the blood of goats and calves but with his own Blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption.... How much more will the Blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works to worship the living God?

HEBREWS 9:11-12, 14

Reflection

The Letter to the Hebrews contains a detailed message, and a complex explanation of, the eternal and salvific role of Jesus in the life of the people of

God. The Hebrew community who embrace him as the Messiah also carry the centuries-old traditions that have shaped their religious and spiritual lives since the time of Moses. As the generations after Moses begin to develop and institutionalize their religious beliefs and practices, the tribe of Levitical priests, descended from Aaron (the brother of Moses), come to be recognized as the heirs to the role of High Priest among the people. Five generations prior to Aaron, Melchizedek reigns as king and priest, in a unique role outside the Levitical line.

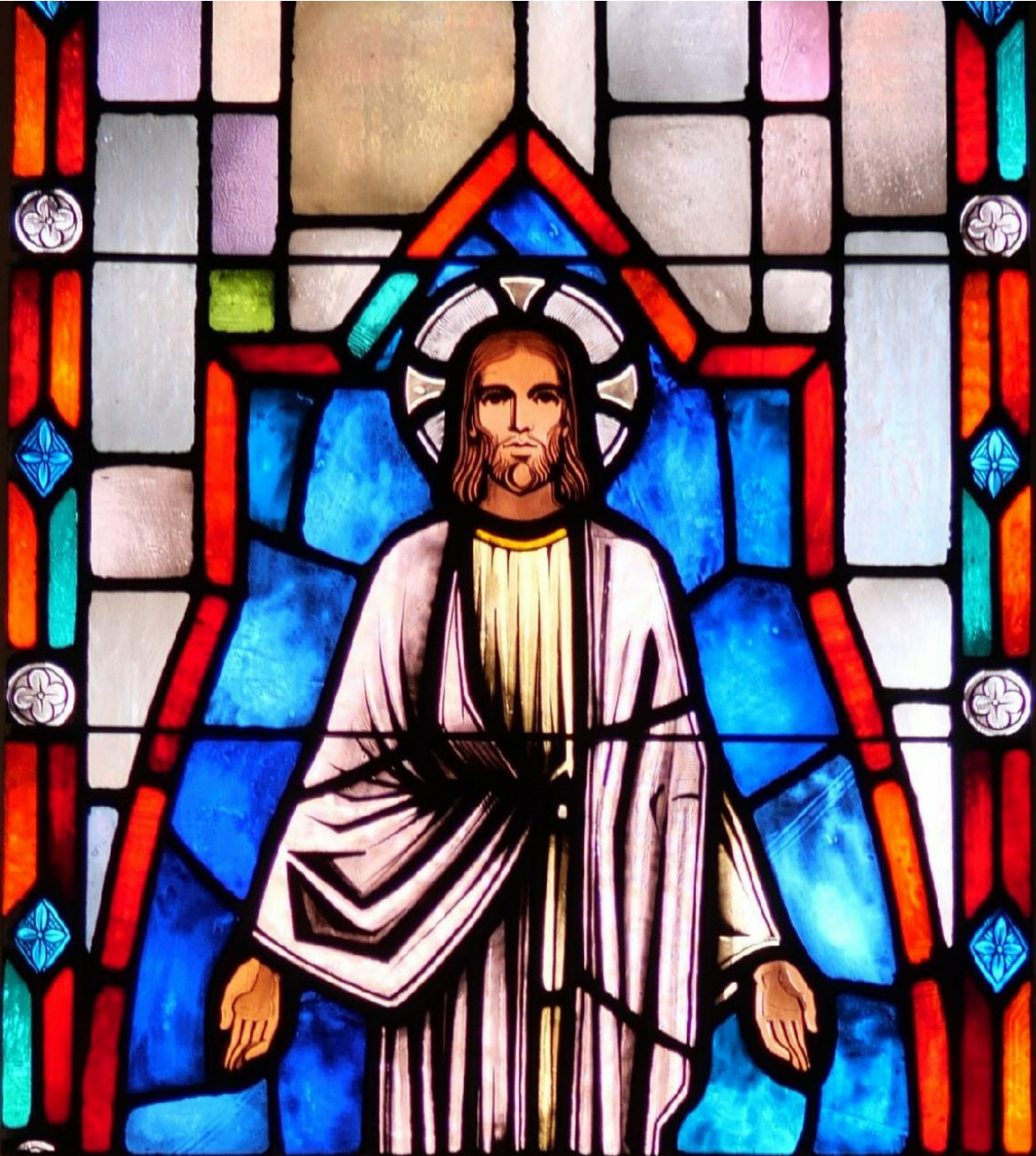
When Jesus is recognized as a unique High Priest in a world of the new covenant based on the Resurrected One, and the Messiah, he is held up as a new Melchizedek, the truly Chosen One of God. Suddenly, a ministry comprised of fallible, sinful, and mortal priests has been supplanted by a singular priest who is perfected by suffering, sinless, and immortal. The blood of sacrificial lambs is replaced by the blood shed by the Lamb of God. The upshot of this reality is that the true High Priest is at the heart of salvation and is the emissary of God's mercy and healing presence.

All of this theological and ecclesial reflection may seem more than a bit abstract, outside the realm of the daily life of the faithful. However, in Jesus, the paradigm of God's saving work in the world shifts radically. The need for priestly agents of a traditional ritual that is external to an individual's experience of God is replaced by a direct and personal connection to the One who manifests the very living relationship of people with the divinity who saves them and makes them whole.

In our own religious context, we re-live many of the same questions and concerns that mark the evolution of Jewish faith and practice. If we proclaim Jesus Lord and Savior, is that communal and familial bond the essential and only need we have to draw closer to the love that redeems us? Or, as a collective body, bound together in our rituals, prayers, and social identity, do we also have a foundational need for those who minister with and for us to help nurture our union with the God who reaches out to us day by day? Is priesthood or a priestly office an organic part of building a communion of believers? These questions have been debated for centuries in our own traditions since the days of the Protestant Reformation. Ultimately, the virtues and limitations of each viewpoint can be discussed, without reaching an impasse that leads to division and ideological anger.

Jesus recognizes the place of priestly ministry in the Jewish communities and synagogues. However, he always stands in opposition to ritual legalism that claims a rigorous and absolute control over people's lives, thoughts, and actions. As he asserts in Mk. 2:27: **The sabbath was made for man and not man for the sabbath.** This simple teaching is a clarion call to each and

all of us. Our ways of exploring and strengthening our walk with God in companionship with Jesus may take varied forms, but our ultimate desire is to surrender our very lives to the One who draws us into divine love and healing. We are invited to cherish that gift, that promise. This is the inner reality of all authentic religious life.





Sacred Heart Chapel, Orange, CA
Photo by Fr. David C. Robinson, SJ

For Pondering

- What does it mean to say in the church that Jesus is our Savior?
- Is priesthood a communal identity or a vocational one? Or both?
- How do you define the essential ‘work’ of one who serves as priest in the community?

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