

Lent Reflections on the Stained-Glass Windows



The East Window

The Holy Trinity: God the Son

Wednesday in the Second Week of Lent

Reading: Hebrews 4: 14-5:10

Since, then, we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore approach the throne of grace with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

Every high priest chosen from among mortals is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is subject to weakness; and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. And one does not presume to take this honour, but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was. So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest, but was appointed by the one who said to him, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'; as he says also in another place, 'You are a priest for ever, according to the order of Melchizedek.'

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

Commentary

The central theme of the Letter to the Hebrews is the portrayal of Christ as the 'Great High Priest.' The writer of Hebrews uses such cultic imagery to say something which was very basic to him: that religion is about access to God.

In the Old Testament there were two things that made this possible: the keeping of the Torah, the faithful observance of the Law; and the priesthood and sacrificial system, through which the barrier of sin into God's presence is removed and fellowship restored. A priest in the Old Testament was a mediator between God and humanity, a go-between. He was someone who represented the people to God and God to His people.

Jesus Himself is the basis of the new covenant relationship with God. He is the supreme Pontifex, or 'bridge builder,' who opens the way to God for others. Christ is both priest and sacrifice: He has offered Himself once for all and effectively removed the barriers between God and humanity and opened the way to God the Father for all people. We can approach God with 'boldness,' says the writer to the Hebrews.

Christ is the supreme Mediator, being God and Man, 'someone who is able to sympathise with our weakness.' The Greek word for 'mediator' is 'mesites' meaning middle: someone who stands in the middle of two people and brings them together in reconciliation. A 'mesites' was also someone who was willing to pay his friend's debt to make things right again.

Christ in our window is dressed in the same way we may see a priest today in church: white alb, girdle (white rope belt), cope and stole. He is the Risen and Ascended Christ who shows us the wounds on His hands, lifting them in the 'orans' position, the ancient gesture of prayer that the priest uses during services.

Christ's ministry is now in heaven. Later in the letter to the Hebrews, the writer says, 'He is able for all time to save those who approach God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.' In the heart of the Godhead, Christ prays for us to the Father.

In the window, above the head of Christ are the words of His promise to the apostles: 'Lo I am with you always even unto the end of the world.'

Meditation

Archbishop Michael Ramsey, speaking to those about to be ordained as priests, said that part of the role of a priest is "to be with God, with the people on our heart." They would be promising at their ordination to be daily with God, with the people on their hearts.

This is a very beautiful and helpful image of what intercessory prayer is all about. It is not merely reading out a list of names, things to give thanks for, or petitions to be asked. It is a much deeper act of love. It is intentionally placing oneself in the presence of God and in that moment sharing in the love and concern that he has for His people.

Prayer, especially intercessory prayer, praying for others, isn't an action of the mind as much as it is an action of the heart: holding people in your heart, and then holding your heart up to God.

Of course, this form of intercession is not just for priests but for all Christians, who are called to share in the priesthood of Christ. You too are called to be with God with the people on your heart.

In a time of quiet, intercede for family, friends, the sick, the needy, for our priests and our church, and for all others in the world that need of God's help at this time.

Prayer

Though the cloud from sight received Him
When the forty days were o'er,
Shall our hearts forget his promise,
'I am with you evermore'?

Intercessor, Friend of sinners,
Earth's Redeemer, plead for me,
Where the songs of all the sinless
Sweep across the crystal sea.

W. Chatterton Dix 1837-98