

Rev. Donato Infante
November 4, 2018

We have been hearing from the Letter to the Hebrews, which deals with the priesthood of Jesus Christ. Last week we heard that the prophecy, “You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” was said in reference to Christ. Melchizedek was an Old Testament figure who appears in Genesis. He is the King of Salem, possibly Jerusalem, and he is also a priest. He is a priest of “God most High.” He appears somewhat mysteriously and offers a sacrifice, not of animals, but of bread and wine. Now where have we heard that before? Every Mass, especially when we pray the Roman canon, also known as the first Eucharistic prayer. For the most part, Jewish people ate their sacrifices as the way of participating in it. We do the same, partaking in the Eucharist each week, which is both my sacrifice (as priest acting in the person of Christ, representing the one sacrifice) and your sacrifice (all that you offer to God united into this sacrifice). God, in his goodness, knew it would be off-putting to eat what looked like human flesh, so he hid himself under the appearances of bread and wine. He was a priest according to the Order of Melchizedek.

Of course, Jewish people needed to keep making new their sacrifice. Their kept needing to be new priests to offer new sacrifices. That is not the case here because of the Resurrection and the Ascension. Jesus, in Heaven, continues to offer the one sacrifice through his priests. There is no new sacrifice, and we participate in it by eating it. Catholicism is very Jewish, something we should be mindful of in light of the terrible attack at the Tree of Life Synagogue last week. We are all spiritually Semites and we must oppose any form of anti-Semitism.

This also means that our worship, given to us by Christ, is not something we have created or made up. We have the perfect sacrifice offered once for all here every day. Many people feel closer to God walking on the beach or in the woods, and they say they get more out of it. Sacrifices, however, are about what we put into it, and nothing can make up for the hard work of faith. This is why we need to be here every week, why the Commandment is to attend the sacrifice every week on the Lord’s Day and other holy days deemed obligatory. No other prayer is the sacrifice of Christ.

It is precisely here where we give God our heart and lay it down on the altar. It is precisely here that we receive the strength to love our neighbor as ourselves. These two commandments, love of God and neighbor, go together. They can never be separated, for we are told elsewhere in Scripture that, “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ but hates his brother, he is a liar; for whoever does not love a brother or sister whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.” It is easy to be a humanist because it requires loving humanity in general. Loving our neighbor is difficult because our neighbor can annoy us. These two commandments go together because it is by loving God in the Mass that we receive the strength to love our neighbor concretely in day to day life. May God bless you.