

*For every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. Heb. 5:1-2*

When you picture them in your mind's eye, what image do you have of Old Testament priests? I think that for many of us the image that comes to mind is that of men in black robes much like we would see in the movie version of "Jesus Christ, Superstar." They are aloof, disconnected from the lives of ordinary people, sitting in judgment, far above the fray.

While this does seem to be the case at times as we read about them in the Gospels, particularly of those priests and especially the high priests who dwelt in Jerusalem (much like elected officials today, high priests served terms and then continued to carry the title with them throughout life), it was not always the case.

For example, take John the Baptist's father, Zechariah. Having been chosen by lot to burn incense in the Temple he received word through the Angel Gabriel, that he and his wife would have a very special child. He was struck dumb because he doubted the Angel's message. After he and his wife, Elizabeth, returned home, to the hill country north of Jerusalem, family and friends gathered to rejoice with her. Zechariah even regained his voice when they questioned the child's name, writing on a tablet, "His name is John," and then speaking a blessing known today as the "Benedictus."

Clearly Zechariah was like the priests mentioned in the opening of Hebrews chapter 5, the ones who were able to deal gently with people because of their own weakness. Fast forward to today we note that in the New Testament era all Baptized believers are priests appointed to act on behalf of people in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices of thanksgiving for the forgiveness of sins, theirs and ours.

In fact, this is no doubt a large part of the answer to the question as to why God leaves us in this place after conversion rather than bringing us straight to heaven, it's for the sake of neighbor, to be his or her priest. In our weakness we are able to deal gently with people for we are already recipients of God's great grace in and through His Son, Jesus. While Zechariah serves as a good model, Jesus is the perfect one for God made He who knew no sin to become sin for us. The wages of sin is death and Jesus received that wage head on, taking upon Himself the full weight of God's wrath according to His humanity and yes, as unbelievable as it might seem, according to His divinity, also.

During this turbulent time, it is clear to me that we are acting as the priests that God has made us to be. People who are looking for things to do are tuning into our services and watching. Many of these people are not in a relationship God the Father in and through the Son by way of the Holy Spirit. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. By making our services available online we are opening up a whole new possibility in bringing the Means of Grace to bear on the lives of people. It's time for God's priests, you, me and all believers, to pray that the people who are hearing the Gospel for the first time or perhaps the first time in a while would

come to faith and when this time of exile passes, that they would seek out places to come into His presence regularly, by being Baptized and instructed towards the reception of Holy Communion.

Pray without ceasing God's word says, and so we, his priests do knowing that He is faithful to hear our prayers and to answer them according to His good will and purpose.