

The Best Priest In The World

A hitchhiker

One day as I was driving home from Detroit, I saw a fine young man standing by the side of the highway with his arm extended in the special sign now universally recognized as a request for a ride. As I had a long trip of several hundred miles before me, I welcomed the opportunity of breaking the monotony by having someone to talk to. I soon discovered that my passenger was a French-Canadian, and naturally, I began to speak in his mother tongue, which he was surprised and delighted to hear. We chatted together for a while like old friends. When we passed a little school house, he told me that he had gone there as a lad and had been taught by the "good sisters," as he called them in the familiar French idiom. Then, I scarcely know why, he spoke in glowing terms of the local parish priest of his boyhood days, for whom he had a deep admiration. I listened with special attention to his account, and led him on to tell me more about his good priest.

The best priest

When at last he came to an end of his description, I said to him,

"Do you know that my priest is the best one in the whole world?"

"No," he said, "who is he?"

"My priest," I replied, "is the best in the world because He never did anything wrong. Even His worst enemies could find no fault in Him. He was kind and friendly to rich and poor alike, whether they were good or bad. He went about doing good to people in all kinds of need. His very goodness made wicked men hate Him, but although they made it very difficult for Him, He never stopped to do anything mean or evil." As I was describing my priest, the young man looked at me with growing interest. Continuing I said,

"But best of all, my priest actually gave up His life for me."

"He died for you?" cried my passenger.

"Yes, He died for me. He took my place that I might go free from the just punishment for my own faults. His enemies managed to put Him to a cruel death and to bury Him, but death could not hold Him, and He came back from the grave alive, showing that He is stronger than death itself. Then He was taken up into heaven and now He prays for me at the right hand of God." At this point of my story, the young man eyed me with amazement mingled with anxiety. Thinking he must surely have understood of whom I was talking, I asked him,

"Do you know who my priest is?"

"No," he stuttered, almost overcome with surprise if not with terror, "who is your priest?"

Jesus Christ, our great High Priest

"You don't know?" I replied, surprised for my part that such an intelligent young man did not understand that the description I had given could fit only One person in all history. "Don't you see that I have just told you about the wonderful life and the atoning (bringing reconciliation by paying the debt owed for an offense) death of the Lord Jesus Christ, the only perfect man that ever lived in this world (Heb 5:9)? He is the only one who could take another's place because He was the Son of God and the Son of man (Mar 15:39; Luk 22:69). He is the only Priest whose sacrifice is able to obtain the full forgiveness of my sins and yours (Heb 9:26)."

Then, to show the amazed young man that the story I had told him was not something I had invented in my own imagination, I gave him my New Testament in his mother tongue, with the approval of the priests of his church printed in it. I asked him to read the following passage, which I here quote from the New Testament translated by Monsignor Knox and likewise bearing the "imprimatur" of the Roman Catholic hierarchy:

And this time there is a ratification by oath; none was taken when those other priests were appointed with an oath when God says to him, The Lord has sworn an irrevocable oath, Thou art a priest for ever; all the more solemn, then, is that covenant for which Jesus has been given us as our surety (one who assumes the responsibilities or debts of another; a guarantor.). Of those other priests there was a succession, since death denied them permanence; whereas Jesus continues for ever, and his priestly office is unchanging; that is why he can give eternal salvation to those who through him make their way to God, he lives on still to make intercession on our behalf. Such was the high priest that suited our need, holy and guiltless and undefiled, not reckoned among us sinners, lifted high above all the heavens; one who has no need to do as those other priests did, offering a two-fold sacrifice day by day, first for his own sins, then for those of the people. What he has done he has done once for all; and the offering was himself. The law makes high priests of men, and men are frail; promise and oath, now, have superseded the law; our high priest, now, is that Son who has reached his full achievement for all eternity (Heb 7:22-28).

Facts from Scripture

Taking these clear statements of the Roman Catholic New Testament as the authority, it was simple and easy to point out to my French-Canadian passenger some important truths about the Saviour that could be summed up briefly in these words:

1. The kind of priest we need is one who is “holy, guiltless, and undefiled.” Where shall we find such a priest? No man, apart from that one perfect man, Jesus Christ, answers to the picture of the true priest that is given in the New Testament.

2. In Jesus Christ we have a priest who did not need to offer sacrifices “first for his own sins,” because He had none. All others who are called priests are poor sinners. Because they must die they cannot have a “priestly office” that is “unchanging.” Only the one priest who lives on still to make intercession for us can give eternal salvation.

3. There is only one sacrifice for sins forever. “What he has done, he has done once for all and the offering was himself” (Heb 10:10). The very multiplicity of all other sacrifices stretching down through the centuries, and repeated day by day in every town and village, is in itself a witness to their ineffectiveness. The Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of those “same sacrifices which can never take away sins,” in contrast to the one and only sacrifice of Christ. To quote from the above-mentioned authorized Roman Catholic version: “One high priest after another must stand there, day after day, offering again and again the same sacrifices, which can never take away our sins; whereas he sits forever at the right hand of God, offering for our sins a sacrifice that is never repeated” (Heb 10:11-12).

4. Jesus Christ is the sole and only priest who can save, and God has given Him a priesthood that “is unchanging,” that is to say, that cannot be handed on to a successor. No one can take His place. Saint Paul says, “There is only one God, and only one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, who is a man, like them all” (1Tim 2:5). One Mediator does not mean two, or three or four. It means ONE. There is one and only one mediator and one sacrifice for sin forever: “By a single offering he has completed his work, for all time, in those whom he sanctifies” (Heb 10:14).

Do you know my Priest?

Permit me, my reader, to ask you the same question that I asked the young man that day sitting beside me in the car. Do you know my Priest? Will you take Him for yours? Will you tell me that you already have another priest? Is he one of those poor mortals, a sinner like yourself, that needs first of all to obtain forgiveness for himself? Then his sacrifices can never avail to take away sins. I invite you to come to this one great Priest and put your trust in Him alone. Because He was guiltless, He was able to pay the price of your salvation on the cross of Calvary (Rom 5:8). Come to Him, who ever lives to pray for you at the right hand of the Majesty on High (Rom 8:34), knowing that He will receive you just as He said He would (Mat 11:28-29).
