

The Festival of Good Friday
18 April 2014
Concordia Lutheran Mission
Terrebonne, Oregon

“God Died on the Cross to Save Men from their Sins against God.”

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.

Hebrews 4:15

Introduction

On Good Friday we are reminded of the Blessed Truth that in the matter of our sins against God, God Himself is our High Priest to intercede with God for us and also God Himself is the Sacrifice to Atone for our sins against God.

God assumed our fallen human nature in Jesus Christ in order to fully discharge all men's obligations to God in and through the human nature. Because Christ accomplished this in and through the human nature, He, as the Apostle St. Paul writes, fully understands the weaknesses of our human nature and its temptations.

Christ endured and overcame all temptations men suffer, including the worst temptation that could befall any man: The temptation on the Cross to curse God when He forsook Him because He bore the guilt of our sins. Consequently, Christ was tempted in all points like we are and more so, yet without sin. Christ, we see, fully discharged all our obligations toward God, making perfect intercession for sinners with the Ultimate Sacrifice of His Life, reconciling God to men, and, thereby, saving.

Our High Priest is remarkable because our High Priest is God Himself in our flesh to die on the Cross in order to Atone for our sins against God.

I. God Himself is Our High Priest to Intercede with God for us for our Sins against God and also the Sacrifice for Our Sins against God .

A. Christ suffered even more than all men in order to atone for the sins of all men against God.

Christ can truly feel our infirmities and trials because He came in our flesh to redeem men from sin in and through the human nature.¹ *Because Christ redeemed men from sin in and through the human nature He assumed in the womb of the Virgin St. Mary, Christ truly felt the burdens of all men throughout His Blessed Life because He was living the life in the flesh that all men should have lived but did not because of sin.* Jesus says:

Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.²

From the womb to the tomb, waking and sleeping, in weal and woe, Christ's entire life was a life of perfect obedience to God in order to save men from their disobedience to God.

This obedience included obedience unto the death of the Cross. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.³

The obedience on the Cross is remarkable because God had forsaken Him on account of His bearing the guilt for our sins. On the Cross Christ cried out:

My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?: Why art Thou so far from helping Me and from the words of My roaring? O My God, I cry in the daytime, but Thou hearest not: and in the night season, and am not silent.⁴

To be forsaken of God is incomprehensible. It is a loneliness that aches with loss and isolation unfathomably wide, dark, and deep. Luther writes of Christ's suffering to be forsaken because of our sins:

In this verse [**Psalm 8:5**] David describes how miserably Christ will be forsaken. No human words can describe this as clearly, briefly, and simply as it is here. He

¹“... the Son of God became Man to destroy the works of the devil in and through the human nature” The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. II, p. 274.

²**St. Matthew 20:28.**

³**Philippians 2:8.**

⁴**Psalm 22:1-2**, text is from *The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 127.

is not speaking of the physical suffering of Christ, which was also great and difficult, but of His sublime, spiritual suffering, which He felt in His soul, a suffering that far surpasses all physical suffering. He describes the highest degree of this suffering and says: “Thou wilt let Him be forsaken of God for a little while.” What this is, no man on earth understands, and no man can reach or express it in words. For to be forsaken of God is far worse than death. ... There is no doubt that in the spirit David is here looking at Christ as He struggles with death in the garden and cries out on the cross, “My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46) For that is His real, sublime, spiritual suffering, which no man can imagine or understand. In the garden He Himself says, “My soul is very sorrowful, even to death” (Matt. 26:38). This is what He wants to say: “I have such sorrow and anguish that I could die of sorrow and anguish.” He withdraws from His disciples about a stone's throw (Luke 22:41), kneels down, and prays. In prayer He begins to struggle with death, and He prays more fervently. His sweat becomes like drops of blood that fall on the ground. David is talking here about this sublime, spiritual suffering, when Christ fought with death and felt nothing in His heart but that He was forsaken of God. And in fact He was forsaken by God. This does not mean that the deity was separated from the humanity – for in this person who is Christ, the Son of God and of Mary, deity and humanity are so united that they can never be separated or divided -- but that the deity withdrew and hid so that it seemed, and anyone who saw it might say, “This is not God, but a mere man, and a troubled and desperate man at that.” The humanity was left alone, the devil had free access to Christ, and the deity withdrew its power and let the humanity fight alone.⁵

⁵*Luther's Works*, Vol. 12, p. 124, 126, amplification in brackets added. “The old Theologians assert that Christ actually endured the torments of hell, when He uttered those mysterious words: ‘Why has Thou forsaken Me?’ ... By that outcry Christ asserts that He was really forsaken of God, forsaken, as only the damned in hell are forsaken. This marks the peak of His suffering. This indicates the height of His anguish. God had withdrawn from Him all help and protection and had delivered him up to darkness and death. At the same time, God had withdrawn from Him every token of grace and comfort. He was totally forsaken of God. Christ no longer saw or felt a ray of divine mercy. He was now actually and really suffering the pangs of hell, which otherwise only those experience who are banished to that place of eternal torment. As men live here in time, they may already feel the crushing burden of God’s wrath and curse resting upon them, yet there are always some evidences of God’s goodness at hand, such as the light they see and the air they breathe. However, in hell such evidences of God’s kindness have vanished altogether. They see and feel only God’s burning wrath and unabating fury. Such was the condition that Christ was in, when on the cross He cried: “‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?’ Christ felt Himself completely forsaken.” The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt, *Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, pp. 68, 67.

Yet, in the midst of this incomprehensible suffering, Christ did not curse God and die, as Job's wife bid Job to do⁶ and as any other man would do, but out of love of God and for our sakes He continued to worship and to cling to God when He called Him "My God" in the midst of His anguish. The Rev. Dr. George Stoeckhardt writes:

Yet, while Christ knows Himself totally forsaken of God in the abyss of hell, He cries, "My God, My God!" Even in such an abject condition, as He was in, He still clings to God as His personal God. This was a God-pleasing prayer that as it were issued from the pit of hell. This is something extraordinary, something unheard of. In the midst of the torments of hell Christ asserts that as His Son He will cling to God and claim Him as His own! Never before and never after has such a confident prayer issued from the abyss of hell on the part of those who are damned in that place. Ordinarily from those who suffer the torments of the damned come only cries and sighs of despair, never prayers of faith. It was by this prayer that Christ conquered and overcame the power of hell.⁷

This prayer from the pit of hell was the last thing the devil needed. The devil did not need a Man obeying, worshiping, and praying to God from the pit of hell, the throne of the devil, the center of rebellion against God and blasphemy of His Name. Because of Christ's Obedience, there is now no place where perfect human righteousness cannot be found, even in the pit of hell. And because perfect human righteousness is found in the pit of hell in Christ, then, hell has been destroyed for men. Consequently, the gates of hell are forever wrecked and lie in ruins⁸, powerless over any man because of Christ's Work for men.⁹

⁶"Then said his wife unto him, Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die."
Job 2:9.

⁷*Lectures on Select Psalms*, tr. the Rev. Dr. H. W. Degner, Ft. Wayne, IN: Concordia Theological Seminary Press, p. 67, underscore added.

⁸"In Matthew 25 Christ says of the Kingdom of Glory that it was prepared for the blessed of His Father from the foundation of the world, hence from the beginning intended for them. Of the fire of hell, however, Christ says that it is prepared for the devil and his angels. If men go to hell, they go to a place originally not prepared for them. 'Hell was originally not built for men.' [Bengal]" The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 498, amplification in brackets added.

Christ was certainly tempted like all men were because He was effecting our salvation in and through our human nature. In addition, Christ was tempted well in excess of what any man or number of men are tempted because He was tempted to curse God when God forsook Him because He bore the horrible burden of the condemnation for the guilt of all men. Christ, however, remained obedient to God and loved Him in the Horrible Crucible of the Cross. Thus the obedience Christ won for us withstands any circumstance, triumphing even over the wrath of God and the gates of hell, and ushers us into the bliss of life eternal.

B. Christ is Our Priest and Sacrifice.

We see that Christ is not only an extraordinary High Priest because He is God Himself in the flesh, but that He is also the Sacrifice for our sins that He Offered to God as our High Priest. We sing in the familiar communion hymn: "Himself the Victim and Himself the Priest."¹⁰

This Victim, i.e., the Sacrifice for our sins, is none other than the Almighty God Himself. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, *even* the hidden *wisdom*, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: Which none of the princes of this

⁹“In all these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of apostles [and does not speak for himself alone, but for all the apostles], as appears from the text itself. For Christ ask not Peter alone, but says: *Whom do ye say that I am?* And what is here said [to Peter alone] in the singular number: *I will give unto thee the keys; and whatsoever thou shalt bind,* etc., is elsewhere expressed [to their entire number], in the plural Matt. 18, 18: *Whatsoever ye shall bind* etc. And in John 20, 23: *Whosoever sins ye remit,* etc. These words testify that the keys are given alike to all the apostles, and that all the apostles are alike sent forth [to preach]. ... Therefore it is necessary that in these passages Peter is the representative of the entire assembly of the apostles, and for this reason they do not accord to Peter any prerogative, or superiority, or lordship [which he had, or was to have had, in preference to the other apostles]. ... However, as to the declaration: *Upon this rock I will build My Church,* certainly the Church has not been built upon the authority of man, but upon the ministry of the confession which Peter made, in which he proclaims that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. He accordingly addresses him as a minister: *Upon this rock,* i.e. upon this ministry [Therefore he addresses him as a minister of this office in which this concession and doctrine is to be in operation, and says: *Upon this rock, i.e., this preaching ministry.*” *The Smalcald Articles: Of the Power and Primacy of the Pope.* 23, 24, 25, *Triglotta*, p. 511.

¹⁰Draw Nigh and Take the Body of the Lord, *The Lutheran Hymnal*, #307.

world knew: for had they known *it*, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.¹¹

The Lutheran Church confesses that it was God Himself who was the Victim and the Sacrifice for sin; It was God who died on the Cross on Good Friday and paid for our sins:

We Christians must know that if God is not also in the balance, and gives the weight, we sink to the bottom with our scale. By this I mean: If it were not to be said [if these things were not true], God has died for us, but only a man, we would be lost. But if “God’s death” and “God died” lie in the scale of the balance, then He sinks down, and we rise up as a light, empty scale. But indeed He can also rise again or leap out of the scale; yet He could not sit in the scale unless He became a man like us, so that it could be said: “God died,” “God’s passion,” “God’s blood”¹², “God’s death.” For in His nature God cannot die; but now that God and man are united in one person, it is correctly called God’s death, when the man dies who is one thing or one person with God.¹³

While our offense is infinite and eternal because the One Whom we’ve offended by our sin is Infinite and Eternal, nevertheless, not even that Infinity and Eternity is bigger than the Almighty Himself. Hence, our debt is more than paid because It is God Himself who suffered to pay our debt to God for us. Herein we see the Great, Incomprehensible, and Marvelous love God has for fallen men. Luther writes:

But now bestir yourself to the end: first, not to behold Christ's sufferings any longer; for they have already done their work and terrified you; but press through all difficulties and behold his friendly heart, how full of love it is toward you, which love constrained him to bear the heavy load of your conscience and your sin. Thus will your heart be loving and sweet toward him, and the assurance of your faith be strengthened. Then ascend higher through the heart of Christ to the heart of God, and see that Christ would not have been able to love you if God had not willed it in eternal love, to which Christ is obedient in his love toward you; there you will find the divine, good father heart, and, as Christ says, be thus

¹¹**I Corinthians 2:7-8.**

¹²“Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” **Acts 20:28**, underscore added.

¹³The Formula of Concord, Thorough Declaration, Article VIII. Of the Person of Christ.⁴⁴, underscore added.

drawn to the Father through Christ. Then will you understand the saying of Christ in Jn 3, 16: “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son,” etc. That means to know God aright, if we apprehend him not by his power and wisdom, which terrify us, but by his goodness and love, there our faith and confidence can then stand unmovable and man is truly thus born anew in God.¹⁴

God Our High Priest Sacrificed Himself, God offered Himself the Victim, in order to pay for our sins against God.

II. Christ is Our High Priest Who Provides Perfect Intercession for Sinners and Salvation in the Gospel.

A. Christ is Our Great High Priest because He delivers perfect salvation.

Because Christ is Our High Priest, we have perfect salvation. We have perfect salvation because Christ intercedes for us not with gold or silver, but His own Precious Body and Blood¹⁵ to atone for the sins of men. There can be no more perfect payment to God for sin¹⁶ than just this, the Suffering and Death of His own Son. For this reason Christ said on the Cross:

It is finished.¹⁷

All sin, transgression, and wrath, is finished because Christ made perfect and complete payment for the sins of all men, just as the Prophet Daniel prophesied of the Grace of the Messiah and His suffering for sinners:

¹⁴*The Complete Sermons of Martin Luther*, Vol. 1.2, p. 190.

¹⁵“I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord, who has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil; not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death....” *The Small Catechism*, p. 10.

¹⁶“St. Paul states in Rom. 5:2: ‘We have obtained access to God in faith’ – not through ourselves but ‘through Christ.’ Therefore we must bring Christ, come with Him, pay God with Him, and carry out all our dealings with God through Him and with Him.” *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 30, p. 12.

¹⁷**St. John 19:30.**

Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophesy, and to anoint the most Holy.¹⁸

The Apostle St. Paul, therefore, writes that we have a perfect High Priest, One, though tried as no man has ever been tested, perfect, flawless, and spotless, because He gives to men perfect and everlasting complete salvation:

For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are*, yet without sin.¹⁹

B. Christ continues to be Our High Priest by saving men through the Gospel.

Christ's Blessed Work as our High Priest, also, He carries out for us by bringing salvation to us in the Gospel.²⁰ Even in the midst of His Passion He was interceding for us by fashioning the Gospel of our salvation. The Apostle St. Paul writes:

... Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word....²¹

In other words, Christ by His Passion was fashioning the Blessed Waters of Holy Baptism so He could, ever doing the work of a priest, sanctify and save us. Luther writes:

¹⁸**Daniel 9:24**, underscore added.

¹⁹**Hebrews 4:15**.

²⁰“**155. What comfort do you derive from Christ's sitting on the right hand of God?** We derive comfort that it is the *exalted* Christ who – A. As our *Prophet sends men* to preach the Gospel of redemption; ³⁸⁸ [He] ascended up far above all heavens that He might fill all things. And *he gave* some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, *pastors and teachers*; for the perfecting of the saints, for the *work of the ministry*, for the edifying of the body of Christ. *Eph. 4:10-12.*” *The Small Catechism*, question 155, p. 119.

²¹**Ephesians 5:25, 26.** God's Sacraments are His Visible Word, His Visible Gospel. “But just as the Word enters the ear in order to strike our hearts, so the rite itself strikes the eye, in order to move the heart. The effect of the Word and of the rite is the same, as it has been well said by Augustine that a Sacrament is a *visible word*, because the rite is received by the eyes, and is, as it were, a picture of the Word, signifying the same thing as the Word. Therefore the effect of both is the same.” *The Apology of the Augsburg Confession, Article XIII (VII): Of the Number and Use of the Sacraments.5, Triglotta*, p. 309.

[H]oly baptism was purchased for us through this same blood, which was shed for us and with which he paid for sin. This blood and its merit and power he put into baptism, in order that in baptism we might receive it. For whenever a person receives baptism in faith this is the same as if he were visibly washed and cleansed with the blood of Christ. For we do not attain the forgiveness of sins through our work, but rather through the death and the shedding of the blood of the Son of God. *But he takes this forgiveness of sin and tucks it into baptism.*²²

Again, we see that by His Passion, Christ fashioned the Gospel of our salvation. The Evangelist St. Luke writes:

Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.²³

The Rev. Dr. John Gerhard writes:

... Christ prayed for His crucifiers: **Father, forgive them**, He says, **for they know not what they do**, the first word which Christ spoke on the cross. In the Old Testament, as the sacrifice was being offered, the high priest at the same time had to instruct the people about its true benefit. Christ, the High Priest of the New Testament, also does this; and He teaches that this His sacrifice is intended for the forgiveness of sins. Also, since Christ suffered not for himself but for us ... He, as it were, forgets His agony and concerns Himself with us human beings and prays that God would forgive us for what we were doing to Him. He thus here portrays Himself as our true Advocate, 1 John 2, who pleads on our behalf before the heavenly Father with the power of His sacrifice. He holds before Him, as it were, His wounds and petitions that God would allow His wrath to abate. Just as in those times Christ's petition was so powerful that many of those who helped crucify Him were converted and the remainder were given forty more whole years in which to repent, ... so now Christ's intercession retains its power to this very day. For we should not think that Christ was praying [only] for the Jews and soldiers who at that time [sic] crucified Him. Rather, this prayer applies to us all. He was crucified for the sake of all our sins, Isa. 53; and with our sins we caused Him pain and effort, Isa. 43. And if we still at times go forth with confidence (brashness) and don't realize what we are doing – that is, we don't

²²*Luther's Works*, Vol. 51, p. 325. "This Baptism is also founded upon the name of Christ ... because it was purchased by Christ's vicarious satisfaction, as Eph. 5:26 expressly teaches, 'Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it ..., that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word.'" The Rev. Dr. Francis Pieper, *Christian Dogmatics*, Vol. III, p. 259.

²³**St. Luke 23:32.**

realize the consequence of lying in sin, nor do we consider what a serious matter the wrath of God is – behold, with His intercession Christ presents the very best and obtains so much that God grants time for repentance and does not so quickly destroy with His wrath. Ponder here also the incomprehensible patience of Christ, how He in His distress also prayed for His worst enemies who dealt with Him so pitiably and horribly. They had affixed Him with nails so that He could do not other good for them. Only His tongue remained which even so, because of torture, stuck to the roof of His mouth, Psa. 22. Yet, He used it still to pray for His crucifers. Indeed, how distant are those from this example of Christ who do not pray for their enemies. Even more distant are those who return evil with evil. Farthest away of all are those who deliberately offend their neighbors. From this, God graciously preserve us. Amen.²⁴

Christ, by His Passion, fashioned for us the Means by which He sanctifies us, the Gospel, giving to us His Perfect Atonement, Absolution, and Salvation.

Conclusion

Our High Priest, Jesus Christ, is without peer. Christ interceded for sinners as our Priest and was Himself the Price of that intercession: His Death on the Cross for the sins of all men. Christ was both Priest and Victim (Sacrifice). Because Christ is God, Our High Priest is God Himself interceding for and atoning for the sin we've committed against God and, thereby, saves men.

This Perfect Salvation Christ fashioned by His Passion, just as He did His Atonement or Satisfaction for our sins. Christ fashioned the Gospel by His Passion in order to save us through the same Gospel with the Perfect Atonement He made for all men. The Gospel is God's Perfect Salvation giving to men the forgiveness of sins, saving faith, life everlasting, and the resurrection of the body through the Intercession and Sacrifice of Our Great High Priest and Savior.

Amen.

²⁴*An Explanation of the History of the Suffering and Death of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the four evangelists, presented so that we may be awakened in the knowledge of the love of Christ and may blessedly grow according to the inner man*, tr. Elmer M. Hohle, ed. David O. Berger, Malone, TX: Repristination Press, pp. 243, 244.

