

Once and for All !

☆ ...sad reminders of sin... (vv.5-6,8)

☆ Glorious body of Christ. (vv.5,7,9-10)

In the name of Christ our Advent Priest, dear rejoicing worshipers of God:

Working retail these days would be tough. But after the unwrapping, who wants to ask a thousand times a day in January, “What’s wrong with it?” Do you know some folks are tempted to take back Christmas? They think there’s something wrong with it, or have been distracted from the truth by glitter.

Our letter to the Hebrews seems to be a collection of sermons by Barnabas or Apollos. It was possibly written to some of the many priests who “*became obedient to the faith*” (Acts 6:7) after Stephen and the seven deacons were chosen. Huge changes were happening in their faith life. You know how change can be hard – loss of loved ones, new job or new boss, friends lost at school. Christmas can’t always be like a Hallmark Hall of Fame production with that sweet kiss at the end. Will you be standing in line this year to take back Christmas? The Holy Spirit wants us to take back Christmas from the commercialism of this humanistic, God-despising world. Look at Christ: **Once and for All!**

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Jewish believers and their priests were tempted by persecution to give back Christmas. So the Holy Spirit’s holy writer was inspired to show how **Jesus is the Ultimate High Priest** (7:11-19 NIV84 all quotes). “*If perfection could have been attained...*” the old way under all the laws of Moses, why did God foretell a change in priesthood: “*You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.*” (Psalm 110:4; cf. Genesis 14) When He says, “*forever,*” that would require “*the power of an indestructible life.*” (7:16,20-28) All the other priests died and had to be replaced. But Jesus has “*a permanent priesthood*” because He cannot die again. And He comes as “*the guarantee of a better covenant.*”

“*Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.*” (Hebrews 7:26f NIV84) What’s wrong with having God’s Son right there to pray for you to God Himself? No need for saints or Mary – you have Jesus. Take back Christmas?

“*The point of what we’re saying is this...*” We have in Christ Jesus **The High Priest of a New Covenant** (8:1-6). This part seems to have come from a sermon on Jeremiah 31:31-34. “*But the ministry Jesus has received is as superior to theirs as the covenant of which he is mediator is superior to the old one, and it is founded on better promises.*” (8:6)

Remember why “*God found fault with the people*”? They swore up and down to be faithful and obey God’s commandments. But Moses didn’t even get down the mountain before they were worshiping the golden calf. Their idolatry continued as kings failed, priests failed, finally prophets failed to obey and guard God’s Word. So God’s solution? “*The time is coming declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel.*” The Old Covenant included the “*If...*” which they could never obey. Now it’s as if God is saying, “No *IF* for you!” Instead He keeps saying, “*I will....*” (8:7-13)

The Old Way (9:1-10) God dealt with His people was under all the rules and regulations given at Mount Sinai. These were perfect laws passed by God without help from Congress and no way for a President to veto them. But they were all part of an **Earthly tabernacle** that was *temporary*. They

involved *Yom Kippur*, the great Day of Atonement. Only the high priest was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place - once a year, ***“never without blood, which he offered for himself and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.”*** (9:7) ***“But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”*** (10:3f) God commanded that all those innocent animals be sacrificed to show the seriousness of sin and foreshadow His ultimate solution.

☆ **Glorious body of Christ.** (vv.5,7,9-10)

This was not an afterthought. God was foretelling **The Blood of Christ permanent** and **The New Way** to His heart which is what He wanted all along. There was no ***“If...”*** in God’s promise to Adam and Eve either, when He told them right in the Tempter’s face, that He would destroy the devil by the ***“Seed of the woman”*** who would ***“crush [the serpent’s] head.”*** (Genesis 3:15)

Just look at the Christmas blessings all wrapped up in God’s ***New Covenant*** of pure grace – all in what Christ has already done for us. We get a clean conscience (9:11-14) that enables us ***“to serve him without fear in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.”*** (Luke 1:74f NIV84) God wrote a New Testament, His last will and testament, then signed it with the blood of Christ. He is our guarantee of an eternal inheritance. (9:15-22) ***“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness”*** (9:22) – sin is just that bad in the eyes of God Almighty. But Jesus’ blood actually gets everything ready up in the true sanctuary of heaven for the big banquet of God’s grace. (9:23f) No need to keep sacrificing Christ as Rome claims in the Mass. Jesus is the perfect Sacrifice. ***“Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”*** (9:26–28)

Are you waiting for Him? We’re no longer waiting in the ***“shadow of the good things that are coming...”*** (10:1-4) God did something that first Christmas that forever removed the need to sacrifice innocent animals. He gave Christ, God’s own Son, a body that He could sacrifice. And **Christ’s Sacrifice is Once for All**. God says, ***“We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Christ once for all.”*** God means this for sure. He won’t ever take that back. Now our lives are filled with Christmas gratitude to ***“live up to what we have already attained”*** (Philippians 3:16), ***“because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.”*** (10:14) That’s our new Christmas reality. *Are you ready to celebrate?* Christ’s kids are practicing hard to help us.

One thing remains: God’s **Call to Persevere** (10:19-25). Every time you’re in this sanctuary you can be encouraged by what you don’t see. Notice there is no curtain hiding God’s altar, which reminds us of the ark of the covenant where the high priest sprinkled the blood on *Yom Kippur*. Now we come directly to God through ***“the curtain, that is, his body.”*** We come close to God in Christ with full and joyful confidence to pray. The result is healthy habits of regular worship and encouraging others too.

Don’t think for a second that God’s grace is “Cheap Grace.” Some do, you know. They think they can deliberately keep on sinning since, “It’s all forgiven anyway.” But listen to God’s warning (10:26-31) and steer clear of sin. Maintain healthy memories even of hard times (10:32-34) because you know God turns tragedy and heartache into blessing and praise. And don’t miss the rich rewards that God promises, rewards of pure grace – earned by Christ our Advent Priest coming without delay. (10:35-39)

Let God’s Minor Prophet with a major message from last Sunday’s sermon cap this off. In his last verse of three short chapters Zephaniah was inspired by God the Holy Spirit to give this awesome promise like a Christmas gift card from God: ***“At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,” says the LORD.*** (Zephaniah 3:20 NIV84) No returns this Christmas – just awesome returns on God’s investment in Christ for us. God won’t take back Christmas; neither will we. Amen.