

“O Lord my God, you are very great.” God is God. We are **not** God. If we had any doubts, our Old Testament reading from the book of Job lays it down for us very clearly: We mortals were **not** responsible for laying the foundation of the earth. We didn’t plan its measurements. We cannot control the clouds or “tilt the waterskins of the heavens when the dust runs into a mass and the clods cling together”. No human being designed the human mind or brain. We are **not** God. In fact, we really cannot even fathom God’s purposes apart from what we know and learn from scripture plus aspects of tradition and reason.

Since the beginning of human consciousness, people have considered God to be the *Creator of all that is, seen and unseen*, as we say in the Nicene Creed. God is the Master over all things in the Universe. In last Sunday’s Gospel, Jesus said, “...for God, **all** things are possible.” Nothing could have come into existence without there being a Creator God ...or plural *gods* as our earliest ancestors would have imagined.

Ancient peoples looked to please and to appease ‘the Gods’ so that the Gods would favor them with fertility, good harvests, and victory in their battles. Clans and tribes developed rituals and religious practices centered on offering sacrifices to the gods –the first portion of their harvest – the first-born of their livestock –even the first-born of their children – for example the ancient Canaanite god Molech and Ba’al, god of Carthage, both written about in the Old Testament. As awful as human sacrifice sounds, in a way we can understand the thinking behind sacrificial systems when we recognize that ancient people would do almost anything to increase their chances of survival as a community.

The context into which Jesus came was such that the people of Israel had a history of sacrificial practice which was ordained by God through Moses, intended to bring to people’s awareness their sins, as the sacrifice symbolized **atonement** for sin. The book in the bible which describes in detail the sacrificial system of the people of Israel is the book called Leviticus, the book of the Levites, because God chose a particular tribe at that time to be priests: the tribe of Levi.

And so we see from our New Testament passage in the letter to the Hebrews that the purpose for the high priests that were chosen among mortals was to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins on behalf of the people. And the revelation given by the Holy Spirit to the writer of the letter to the Hebrews is that Jesus Christ was

designated by God as a high priest, however not through the tribe of Levi, but through the order of Melchizedek.

Other than a difficult name to pronounce, what is the order of Melchizedek? Melchizedek is mentioned twice in the letter to the Hebrews and in only one other place in the bible, in Genesis chapter 14. In Genesis all the important people have got their birth and their death noted - but there is no record of Melchizedek's birth or death – no beginning and no end. He's presented in Genesis 14 as the king of Salem. In Hebrew his name means King of Righteousness, and the name of his kingdom, Salem, means peace. So the writer of the letter to the Hebrews in the New Testament is pointing to Jesus as being in the order of Melchizedek – king of righteousness with a kingdom of peace. Not only that but the Hebrews author proclaims that God said that Jesus is a priest for ever – no beginning and no end - an eternal priest who while he was present in body on earth was tempted as we are but did not sin. He submitted to God's will for him even through his suffering – and became the source of eternal salvation for all who are obedient to his call to follow him.

God is God. People are called by God to follow him. People are called by God to be *like* God. But only God is God.

So we come to our Gospel passage, in which James and John ask Jesus to do for them whatever they ask of him. Humans, part of God's Creation, asking Jesus, who is God to do what they want! That's a bit rich, isn't it?! But here's where we learn something so important about Jesus. He's not like other 'gods'. The ancient gods needed to be served, right? Pleased and appeased, or else you're not going to win the battle! But through Jesus, God has made it known to us that God is a 'servant king' – he came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. That turned around the old way of thinking about God 180 degrees!

And that's what Jesus does, isn't it? Jesus said:

"You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. ⁴³ But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all."

Jesus completely flipped over the conventional ways of approaching and responding to God. Now, Jesus as Emmanuel, God is with us – with us by the Spirit

who empowers us – calls us to be his body with us in the Eucharist as with bread and wine we remember that he gave his body and blood as the new covenant between God and people – animal sacrifices no longer needed – and we ingest these elements symbolizing the intimacy with which Jesus has promised to be with us – in our very being. And we sure need him! Jesus says (John 16:33) *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”*

God is God – we are not God – but through Jesus, God’s resurrection life has been given to us. We are called to follow him by loving and serving as he loved and served us, not for our own blessing but to bless others in sacrificial ministry. Jesus asks James and John, “are you able to be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?” Yesterday I attended our deanery convocation where among other things we discussed “baptismal ministry”, which is well stated as 5 promises of our Baptismal Covenant:

- To continue in the apostle’s teaching and fellowship, the breaking of bread, and the prayers;
- To persevere in resisting evil, and, whenever we fall into sin repent and return to the Lord;
- To proclaim by word and example the Good news of God in Christ;
- To seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as ourselves;
- To strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being.

May we live up to these baptismal promises, not because we seek glory for ourselves, but in recognition of our great and *unusual* God. Amen.