

LETTER TO THE HEBREWS



“**H**ebrews” was the name given to the Jews who lived in Palestine, unlike the majority who had emigrated to other countries. This letter is addressed to the first Christian communities of Palestine, formed by Jews—by race—who had been persecuted and punished and whose possessions had even been confiscated, all because they had become followers of Christ. They no longer had anything in this world and they had to encourage one another with the assurance that, at the conclusion of their exile, they would find the true Home where Jesus went after his suffering. In this way they were like their Hebrew ancestors who had lived in the desert, hoping and searching for the Promised Land.

It is helpful to know that this letter is addressed to people familiar with the Old Testament: they may well have been Jewish priests who had believed in Jesus and now were going through a serious crisis. Indeed, up until then, the temple had been their whole lives, since they were priests: they would offer sacrifices and would receive part of the sacrificed animals in payment. Now, not only had they been excluded and

removed from the temple by the Jews, but Christ had replaced them. For he had come as the New Temple and the perfect victim pleasing to God, as the only priest capable of putting people in touch with God.

He had relegated the temple of Jerusalem and its cult to the rank of the outmoded. He, a layman, had organized his Church, disregarding the priesthood of the “sons of Aaron,” the Jewish priests. The priest, he who is the link between humans and the all-holy God, was he and he alone.

So Christ had taken their work away from them, as well as their reason for being. At times, these men who had known Jesus, the man, had their doubts: was it certain that everything had changed because of him?

To confirm their faith, this letter shows them that the Jewish religion with its imposing ceremonies in the temple of Jerusalem was but the image of something greater. The pardon of sin and the spirit of religion—the aspiration of the entire Old Testament—was to be the work of the authentic priest of all humanity, Jesus, the Son of God. There is now no other sacrifice but his, which begins on the cross and ends in glory.

Are there not many “Hebrews” in today’s world? The sick who no longer have hope, the persecuted Christians, the people who do not accept the injustice and mediocrity of the society in which we live. Although many of them may not understand all the premises and biblical quotations in this letter, they will feel encouraged in the faith.

Besides, the word “priest” has become so important in the Church that it is useful to find here the biblical text which has gone deeper into the meaning of priesthood and its reorientation through the very fact of the sacrifice of Jesus.

This letter was written in Rome, perhaps in the year 66, when the war in which Jerusalem was destroyed was approaching. These were the last months of Paul’s life; he was imprisoned in Rome for the second time. This letter reflects Paul’s thoughts, but he did not write it. It is quite possible that the author is Apollos, mentioned in Acts 18:24-28, “a man well-versed in Scriptures” and who “proved from the Scriptures (the Old Testament) that Jesus is the Messiah.”

LETTER TO THE HEBREWS



1 God has spoken in the past to our ancestors through the prophets in many different ways, although never completely; ²but, in our times, he has spoken definitively to us through his Son.

He is the one God appointed heir of all things since, through him, he unfolded the stages of the world.

³He is the radiance of God's glory and bears the stamp of God's hidden being so that his powerful word upholds the universe. And after taking away sin, he took his place at the right hand of the divine Majesty in heaven.

⁴So he is now far superior to angels, just as the name he received sets him apart from them. ⁵To what angel did God say: *You are my son, I have begotten you today?* And to what angel did he promise: *I shall be a father to him and he will be a son to me?* ⁶On sending his Firstborn into the world, God says: *Let all the angels adore him.* ⁷Whereas, about angels, we find words like these: *God sends the angels like wind, makes his servants flames of fire.* ⁸But of the Son, we read this: *Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever; a rule of justice is your rule.* ⁹*You loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellow kings.*

¹⁰And also, these words: *Lord, in the beginning, you placed the earth on its foundation and the heavens are the work of your hands.* ¹¹*They will disappear, but you remain. They all wear out like a garment;* ¹²*you will fold them like a cloak, and change them. You, on the contrary, are always the same, and your years will never end.*

¹³God never said to any of his angels: *Sit here at my right side until I put your enemies as a footstool under your feet.* ¹⁴For all these spirits are only servants, and God sends them to help those who shall be saved.

HEBREWS 1:1-14

Read: This is a sermon about the Son of God: God created the universe through the Son, the reflection of God's glory, and the universe is sustained through His powerful word. If long ago, God has spoken through the prophets, now He speaks through His Son who purified the world of sins and is seated at God's right hand. No one can be compared to the Son of God, not even the angels.

Reflect: Christ is the center of creation and redemption. What does this passage suggest for your everyday life? Can you see his creative and redeeming presence in the world? The text says that now God speaks through His Son. Do you listen to His words? What do they tell you?

Pray: Help us, Lord, to contemplate the creative and saving presence of your Son. May we be able to accept his word and to transform our lives and give you glory.

Act: Repeat interiorly today what Christ represents for you. Before going to sleep give thanks to God for what you experienced in your heart and in your relationship with others.

2¹So, we must pay the closest attention to the preaching we heard, lest we drift away. ²If words, spoken through angels, became law, and all disobedience or neglect received its due reward, ³how could we now escape, if we neglect such powerful salvation? For the Lord himself announced it first, and it was later confirmed by those who heard it. ⁴God confirmed their testimony by signs, wonders, and miracles of every kind—especially by the gifts of the Holy Spirit that he distributed according to his will.

⁵The angels were not given dominion over the new world of which we are speaking. ⁶Instead, someone declared in Scripture: *What is man that you should be mindful of him, what is the son of man that you should care for him?*⁷ *For a while, you placed him a little lower than the angels, but you crowned him with glory and honor.* ⁸*You have given him dominion over all things.*

When it is said that God gave him dominion over all things, nothing

is excluded. As it is, we do not yet see his dominion over all things. ⁹But Jesus, who suffered death, and *for a little while, was placed lower than the angels*, has been *crowned with honor and glory*. For the merciful plan of God demanded that he experience death on behalf of everyone.

¹⁰God, from whom all come, and by whom all things exist, wanted to bring many children to glory, and he thought it fitting to make perfect through suffering, the initiator of their salvation. ¹¹So, he who gives and those who receive holiness are one. He, himself, is not ashamed of calling us brothers and sisters, ¹²as we read: *Lord, I will proclaim your name to my brothers; I will praise you in the congregation*. ¹³He also says: *I will trust in God; here I am, and the children God has given me*. ¹⁴And because all those children share one same nature of flesh and blood, Jesus, likewise, had to share this nature. This is why his death destroyed the one holding the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and freed those who remained in bondage all their lifetime because of the fear of death.

¹⁶Jesus came to take by the hand, not the angels, but the human race. ¹⁷So, he had to be like his brothers and sisters in every respect in order to be the high priest, faithful to God and merciful to them, a priest able to ask pardon and atone for their sins. ¹⁸Having been tested through suffering, he is able to help those who are tested.

HEBREWS 2:1-18

Read: For the first time the author mentions Jesus. Jesus is the Son of God who overcame sin by obedience to the Father's will and by his solidarity with humanity. Because Jesus is like us, God perfected humanity through him. Likened to us in every respect, Jesus became a merciful and faithful high priest for the remission of sins.

Reflect: Jesus became one of us, he knows our weaknesses. He saved us because we are important to him and he loves us. Do you trust in Jesus' redemptive love? What does this text suggest to you: "Having been tested through suffering, he is able to help those who are tested" (v. 18)?

Pray: Lord God, through the sacrifice of your Son you have redeemed us; help us to remain firm in your love.

Act: Read slowly chapter 17 of the Gospel of John and compare that chapter with the first two chapters of Hebrews. Try that the testimony of your faith may help your people to share the gift of salvation of Jesus to others.

Christ came as the new Moses

3¹Therefore, holy brothers, partners in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our faith.

²He is faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses was *a faithful steward over God's household*; ³but Jesus deserves much greater honor than Moses since he who builds the house is greater than the house. ⁴As every house has a builder, God is the builder of all. ⁵It is said that Moses was found faithful, *as a servant of God over all his household*, and as a witness of a former revelation from God. ⁶Christ came as the Son to whom the house belongs; and we are his household, provided that we stand firm in hope and courage.

⁷Listen to what the Holy Spirit says: *If only you would hear God's voice today!* ⁸*Do not be stubborn, as they were in the place called Rebellion,* ⁹*when your ancestors challenged me in the desert, although they had seen my deeds* ¹⁰*for forty years. That is why I was angry with those people and said: Their hearts are always going astray and they do not understand my ways.* ¹¹*I was angry and made a solemn vow: They will never enter my rest.*

¹²So, brothers, be careful, lest some of you come to have an evil and unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. ¹³Encourage one another, day by day, as long as it is called today. Let no one become hardened in the deceitful way of sin. ¹⁴We are associated with Christ, provided we hold steadfastly to our initial hope until the end.

¹⁵Scripture says: *If you hear God's voice, do not be stubborn as they were in the place called Rebellion.* ¹⁶Who are those who, having heard, still rebelled? They were all those who came out of Egypt with Moses. ¹⁷With whom was God angry for forty years? With those who sinned and whose bodies fell in the desert. ¹⁸To whom did God swear that they would not enter into his rest? To those who had disobeyed. ¹⁹We see, then, that unbelief prevented them from reaching their rest.

HEBREWS 3:1-19

Read: Moses was the trustworthy servant of God, as is Jesus, but on a higher level since he is the Son of God. We can place all of our trust in Jesus unlike those who rebelled against Moses as he led them in the desert.

Reflect: What does it mean for you to listen to the words of Jesus and open your heart to his words? What are the biggest difficulties you find to remain faithful to the message of Jesus?

Pray: Pray that you do not have “an evil unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.”

Act: Pray with Psalm 95. Repeat during the day the following words: “Come, let us sing to the Lord, let us make a joyful sound to the Rock of our salvation” (95:1).

4¹Therefore, let us fear while we are invited to enter the rest of God, lest any of you be left behind. ²We received the gospel exactly as they did, but hearing the message did them no good because they did not share the faith of those who did listen. ³We are now to enter this rest because we believed, as it was said: *I was angry and made a solemn vow: they will never enter my rest*—that is, the rest of God after he created the world. ⁴In another part, it was said about the seventh day: *And God rested on the seventh day from all his works*. ⁵But, now, it is said: *They will not enter my rest*. ⁶We must conclude that some will enter the rest of God and that those who first received the good did not because of their disobedience. ⁷Yet God, again, assigns a day when he says: *today*, and declares through David, many years later: *If you hear God’s voice today, do not be stubborn*.

⁸So, it was not Joshua who let them enter the land of rest; otherwise, God would not have assigned another day later on. ⁹Then, some other rest, or Sabbath, is reserved for the people of God. ¹⁰For those who enter this rest of God, rest from all their works, as God rests from his work.

¹¹Let us strive then to enter the rest, and not to share the misfortune of those who disobeyed. ¹²For the word of God is living and effective, sharper than any two-edged sword. It pierces to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and judges the intentions and thoughts of

the heart. ¹³All creation is transparent to him; everything is uncovered and laid bare to the eyes of him to whom we render an account.

Christ is our high priest

¹⁴We have a great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has entered heaven. Let us then hold fast to the faith we profess. ¹⁵Our high priest is not indifferent to our weaknesses, for he was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet, without sinning. ¹⁶Let us then with confidence, approach the throne of grace. We will obtain mercy and, through his favor, help in due time.

HEBREWS 4:1-16

Read: We “enter into the rest of God” through Jesus, who is a trustworthy and merciful high priest who carries our prayers to God. Jesus’ compassion for us is emphasized.

Reflect: Have you thought about the goal of your life? What is your final aim? Do you long for “the rest in God”? What does this text tell you: “We have a great high priest, Jesus, the Son of God, who has entered heaven. Let us, then, hold fast to the faith we profess. Our high priest is not indifferent to our weaknesses, for he was tempted, in every way, just as we are, yet, without sinning. Let us, then, with confidence, approach the throne of grace. We will obtain mercy and, through his favor, help in due time”?

Pray: O Lord, the strength to those who wait in you, listen to our prayers. We are frail and can do nothing without you. Help us with your grace to accept and live the message of your Son who gave his life for us.

Act: Write down a list of the worries and weaknesses that bother you at this time. Offer them to the Lord asking Him to transform them into opportunities and events of life and love, that they may manifest the saving action of God.

5¹Every high priest is taken from among mortals and appointed, to be their representative before God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sin. ²He is able to understand the ignorant and erring, for he, himself, is subject to weakness. ³This is why he is bound to offer sacrifices for

his sins, as well as for the sins of the people. ⁴Besides, one does not presume to take this dignity but takes it only when called by God, as Aaron was.

⁵Nor did Christ become high priest in taking upon himself this dignity, but it was given to him by the one who says: *You are my son, I have begotten you today.* ⁶And in another place: *You are a priest forever, in the priestly order of Melchizedek.*

⁷Christ, in the days of his mortal life, offered his sacrifice with tears and cries. He prayed to him who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his humble submission. ⁸Although he was Son, he learned through suffering what obedience was, ⁹and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him. ¹⁰This is how God proclaimed him Priest in the order of Melchizedek.

HEBREWS 5:1-10

Read: The text describes, first, the characteristics of the Jewish priest: he is chosen, he does not appoint himself; he represents people to God and as a man he also offers sacrifices for himself. Then the letter mentions the suffering priesthood of Jesus: he was chosen by God to bring us to Him, and his sacrifice was forever.

Reflect: Jesus offered his own life to save us, he sacrificed for us. What sacrifices do you do for others? What does the following text tell you: "Although he was Son, he learned, through suffering, what obedience was, and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for those who obey him" (vv. 8-9)?

Pray: Help us, Lord, to follow in your footsteps; that we may be able to show our love in the way we care for others; and that the way of Christian living may be a consolation, help, and strength for all those who suffer.

Act: Go to a hospital and, in a discrete way, try to help anybody in need. Donating blood is a good suggestion!

You should be teachers

¹¹About this, we have much to say, but it is difficult to explain, for you have become dull in understanding. ¹²You should be teachers by this time, but in fact, you need to be taught again the basic elements of God's teaching. You need milk, not solid food. ¹³Those fed with milk are still infants: this refers to those who have not been tested in the way of righteousness. ¹⁴Solid food is for adults who have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil.

6¹Therefore, let us leave the elementary teaching about Christ, and move forward to a more advanced knowledge, without laying again the foundation, that is: turning away from dead works, faith in God, ²the teaching about baptisms and laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead and the final judgment. ³This is what we shall do, God permitting.

⁴In any case, it would be impossible to renew again, through penance, those who have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift, and received the Holy Spirit, ⁵tasted the beauty of the word of God, and the wonders of the supernatural world. ⁶If, in spite of this, they have ceased to believe and have fallen away, it is impossible to move them a second time to repentance, when they are crucifying, on their own account, the Son of God, and spurning him publicly. ⁷Soil that drinks the rain falling continually on it and produces profitable grass for those who till it, receives the blessings of God, ⁸but the soil that produces thorns and bushes is poor soil, and in danger of being cursed. In the end, it will be burned.

Remain firm in our hope

⁹Yet, even though we speak like this, we are more optimistic, dear friends, regarding you and your salvation. ¹⁰God is not unjust, and will not forget everything you have done for the love of his name; you have helped, and still help, the believers. ¹¹We desire each of you to have, until the end, the same zeal for reaching what you have hoped for. ¹²Do not grow careless but imitate those who, by their faith and determination, inherit the promise.

¹³Remember God's promise to Abraham. God wanted to confirm it with an oath, and, as no one is higher than God, ¹⁴he swore by himself: I shall bless you and give you many descendants. ¹⁵By just patiently waiting, Abraham obtained the promise.

¹⁶People are used to swearing by someone higher than themselves, and their oath affirms everything that could be denied. ¹⁷So God committed himself with an oath in order to convince those who were to wait for his promise, that he would never change his mind. ¹⁸Thus, we have two certainties in which it is impossible that God be proved false: promise and oath. That is enough to encourage us strongly when we leave everything to hold to the hope set before us. ¹⁹This hope is like a steadfast anchor of the soul, secure and firm, thrust beyond the curtain of the temple into the Sanctuary itself, ²⁰where Jesus has entered ahead of us—Jesus, high priest for ever in the order of Melchizedek.

HEBREWS 5:11—6:20

Read: This passage is a call to maturity and to perseverance in the faith we have received. Using the analogy of farming, believers who reject the faith are like soil that produces thorns, whereas this community, strong in work and love, are the good soil that feeds others.

Reflect: Why are you trustworthy and faithful? How do you preserve your hope in God in discouraging times?

Pray: All-powerful and eternal God, increase our faith, hope, and love that we may remain faithful to your promise and oath.

Act: Help somebody who may be downhearted or distrustful of God's love. May your company make them realize the love and care that God has for them.

Melchizedek, a figure of Christ

7¹Scripture says that *Melchizedek, king of Salem, a priest of the Most High God, came out to meet Abraham who returned from defeating the kings. He blessed Abraham, and Abraham gave him a tenth of everything.*

²Let us note that the name Melchizedek means king of Justice, and that king of Salem means king of Peace. ³There is no mention of a father, mother or genealogy; nothing is said about the beginning or the end of his life. In this, he is the figure of the Son of God, the priest who remains forever.

⁴See, then, how great Melchizedek was. Even Abraham gave him a tenth of the spoils! ⁵When the descendants of Levi are consecrated priests, they are commanded to collect tithes from their people, that is, from their kindred, though these also are descended from Abraham. ⁶Here, however, Melchizedek, who does not belong to the family of the Levites, is given tithes from Abraham. Still more, he blesses him, the man of God's promise. ⁷There is no doubt that he who blesses is higher than the one who is blessed. ⁸In the first case, we see that tithes are received by those who are mortals; here, instead, Melchizedek is mentioned as one who lives on.

⁹When Abraham pays the tenth, it is so to speak, the Levites, receivers of the tithes, who pay the tithes ¹⁰because, in a way, Levi was still in the body of Abraham his ancestor, when Melchizedek met him.

¹¹The institutions of the chosen people are founded upon the Levitical priesthood, but with it they could not attain what is perfect and permanent. If that were possible, why would there be a need of another priest *after the order of Melchizedek*, instead of Aaron's? ¹²If there is a change in the priesthood, the law also has to be changed. ¹³Jesus, to whom all this has a reference, was from a tribe that never served at the altar. ¹⁴All know that he belonged to the tribe of Judah that is not mentioned by Moses when he speaks of the priesthood.

¹⁵All this, however, becomes clear, if this priest, after the likeness of Melchizedek, ¹⁶has, in fact, received his mission, not on the basis of any human law, but by the power of immortal life. ¹⁷Because Scripture says: *You are a priest forever, in the priestly order of Melchizedek*. ¹⁸With this, the former disposition is removed as insufficient and useless ¹⁹(for the law did not bring anything to perfection). At the same time, a better hope is given to us: that of drawing near to God.

²⁰This change is confirmed by God's oath. When the others became priests, God did not compromise himself with an oath, ²¹but Jesus is confirmed with an oath, as it is said: *The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: you are a priest forever*. ²²Therefore, Jesus is our assurance of a better Covenant.

²³The former priests were many, since, as mortal men, they could not remain in office. ²⁴But Jesus remains forever, and the priesthood shall not be taken from him. ²⁵Consequently, he is able to save, for all time,

those who approach God through him. He always lives to intercede on their behalf.

²⁶It was fitting that our high priest to be holy, undefiled, set apart from sinners, and exalted above the heavens; ²⁷a priest who does not, first, need to offer sacrifice for himself before offering for the sins of the people as high priests do. He offered himself in sacrifice, once and for all. ²⁸And whereas, the law elected weak men as high priests, now, after the law, the word of God, with an oath, appointed the Son, made perfect forever.

HEBREWS 7:1-28

Read: The theme of priesthood is further developed. As Melchizedek is a higher form of priest than the Levites, the priesthood of Christ is higher yet, sinless, he had no need to offer a sacrifice for himself., he is the sacrificed he offered for the sins of others.

Reflect: Jesus is our high priest. What does the offering of his Body and Blood in the Eucharist mean to you? How do you unite with this offering?

Pray: Lord, may your Body and Blood shared in the Eucharist transform us into a ferment of a new life for society.

Act: Invite your people to actively participate in the Eucharist and in the life of your parish. Let this be a thanksgiving offer that you and your people make to the Lord for all the graces received.

A new Sanctuary and a new Covenant

8¹The main point of what we are saying is that we have a high priest. He is seated at the right hand of the divine majesty in heaven, ²where he serves as minister of the true temple and Sanctuary, set up not by any mortal, but by the Lord.

³A high priest is appointed to offer to God gifts and sacrifices, and Jesus also has to offer some sacrifice. ⁴Had he remained on earth, he would not be a priest, since others offer the gifts according to the law. ⁵In fact, the ritual celebrated by those priests is only an imitation, and

shadow of the heavenly Sanctuary. We know the word of God to Moses with regard to the construction of the holy tent. He said: *You are to make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain.*

⁶Now, however, Jesus enjoys a much higher ministry in being the mediator of a better Covenant founded on better promises. ⁷If all had been perfect in the first Covenant, there would have been no need for another one. ⁸Yet God sees defects when he says:

The days are coming—it is the word of the Lord—when I will draw up a new Covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

⁹*It will not be like the Covenant that I made with their ancestors on the day I took them by the hand and led them out of Egypt. They did not keep my Covenant, and so I myself have forsaken them, says the Lord.*

¹⁰*But this is the Covenant that I will make with the people of Israel in the days to come: I will put my laws into their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.*

¹¹*None of them will have to teach one another or say to each other: Know the Lord, for they will know me from the least to the greatest. ¹²I will forgive their sins and no longer remember their wrongs.*

¹³Here, we are being told of a new Covenant; which means that the first one had become obsolete, and what is obsolete and aging is soon to disappear.

HEBREWS 8:1-13

Read: The metaphor of priesthood as a way of explaining Christ Jesus reaches its main point. The first covenant gives way to a more excellent relationship with God since it is founded on better the forgiveness of sin through Christ Jesus.

Reflect: Covenants are agreements between God and His people. The original covenant had to be replaced by one written “on their hearts” and that covenant now exceeded by the sacrifice of Christ. What is your covenant with God?

Pray: All powerful God, from whom all good things come, give us the grace to know how to give witness to the New Covenant sealed by your Son, not as an external obligation, but as a Law sealed in the heart, a new way of living in this world.

Act: What are the concrete consequences for you of the New Covenant inaugurated by Jesus? Make them happen in your everyday life. Participate in the Eucharist and renew your Christian commitment.

The temple in Jerusalem

9¹The first Covenant had rites and regulations. There was also a Sanctuary—an earthly one. ²A first tent was prepared with the lampstand, the table and the bread of the presence; this is called the Holy Place. ³Behind the second curtain, there is a second Sanctuary called the Most Holy Place, ⁴with the gold altar for the burning of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant fully covered with gold. The ark contained a golden jar holding the manna, Aaron's rod that had sprouted leaves and the two slabs of the Covenant. ⁵Above the ark, the two cherubim of glory overshadowed the Seat of Mercy. But we cannot describe it here in detail.

⁶With everything arranged as described, the priests continually enter the first room to fulfill their ministry; ⁷but the high priest enters only once a year, the second one, and not without bringing the blood, which he will offer for himself and for the sins of the people. ⁸By this, the Holy Spirit teaches us that the way into the inner Sanctuary is not open as long as the first tent still stands. ⁹Here is a teaching, by means of figures, for the present age: the gifts and sacrifices presented to God cannot bring the people offering them to interior perfection. ¹⁰These are no more than food, drink, and different kinds of cleansing by water; all these are human regulations, awaiting a reformation.

Jesus entered with his own blood

¹¹But now, Christ has appeared as the high priest, with regard to the good things of these new times. He passed through a Sanctuary more noble and perfect, not made by hands, that is, not created. ¹²He did not take with himself the blood of goats and bulls, but his own blood, when he entered, once and for all, into this Sanctuary, after obtaining definitive redemption. ¹³If the sprinkling of people, defiled by sin, with the blood of goats and bulls, or with the ashes of a heifer, provides them with exterior cleanness and holiness, ¹⁴how much more will it be with the blood

of Christ? He, moved by the eternal spirit, offered himself as an unblemished victim to God, and his blood cleanses us from dead works so that we may serve the living God.

¹⁵So, Christ is the mediator of a new Covenant or testament. His death made atonement for the sins committed under the old testament, and the promise is handed over to all who are called to the everlasting inheritance. ¹⁶With every testament, it is necessary to wait until its author has died. ¹⁷For a testament infers death and has no value while the maker of it is still alive.

¹⁸That is why the first Covenant was not ratified without blood. ¹⁹Moses proclaimed to the assembled people all the commandments of the law; then he took the blood of bulls and goats, and mixed it with water, and with these he sprinkled the book itself, and all the people, using scarlet, wool, and hyssop, ²⁰saying: *This is the blood of the Covenant that God commanded you.* ²¹In the same way, he sprinkled with blood the Sanctuary and all the objects of the ritual. ²²According to the law, almost all cleansings have to be performed with blood; there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

²³It was necessary that mere copies of supernatural realities be purified, but now, these realities need better sacrifices. ²⁴Christ did not enter some sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself. He is now in the presence of God, on our behalf. ²⁵He had not to offer himself many times, as the high priest does: he who may return every year because the blood is not his own. ²⁶Otherwise, he would have suffered many times from the creation of the world. But no; he manifested himself only now, at the end of the ages, to take away sin by sacrifice, ²⁷and as humans die only once and afterward are judged, ²⁸in the same way Christ sacrificed himself once to take away the sins of the multitude. There will be no further question of sin when he comes again to save those waiting for him.

HEBREWS 9:1-28

Read: The metaphor switches to holy places as a place of sacrifice, where God meets humanity. From desert, to tent, to temple, and now to the person of Christ. Christ is meeting place between God and humanity and all the previous blood sacrifices

have been replaced by the sacrifice of his blood, removing sin for all time.

Reflect: The purpose of this section is to emphasize that humanity is reconciled to God through Christ Jesus. What do redemption and salvation mean now? What does the following text tell you: “Christ did not enter some sanctuary made by hands, a copy of the true one, but heaven itself. He is now in the presence of God, on our behalf” (v. 24)?

Pray: Holy Spirit, help us to recognize the moments of salvation that happen in our daily lives, to give you thanks with the right witness of the faith that we profess.

Act: Share in the redemptive work of Jesus by promptly offering your help to whoever asks for it.

The old Covenant prefigures the new

10¹The religion of the law is only a shadow of the good things to come; it has the patterns but not the realities. So, year after year, the same sacrifices are offered without bringing the worshipers to what is the end. ²If they had been cleansed once and for all, they would no longer have felt guilt, and would have stopped offering the same sacrifices. ³But no, year after year their sacrifices witness to their sins, ⁴and never will the blood of bulls and goats take away these sins.

⁵This is why, on entering the world, Christ says: *You did not desire sacrifice and offering;* ⁶*you were not pleased with burnt offerings and sin offerings.* ⁷Then I said: “*Here I am. It was written of me in the scroll. I will do your will, O God.*”

⁸*First, he says: Sacrifice, offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire nor were you pleased with them—although they were required by the law.* ⁹Then he says: *Here I am to do your will.*

This is enough to nullify the first will and establish the new. ¹⁰Now, by this will of God, we are sanctified once and for all by the sacrifice of the body of Christ Jesus. ¹¹So, whereas every priest stands daily by the altar, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices that can never take away sins, ¹²Christ has offered, for all times, a single sacrifice for sins, and has taken his seat *at the right hand of God*, ¹³waiting until God *puts his*

enemies as a footstool under his feet. ¹⁴By a single sacrifice, he has brought those who are sanctified to what is perfect forever.

¹⁵This also was testified by the Holy Spirit. For after having declared: ¹⁶*This is the Covenant that I will make with them in the days to come—says the Lord—I will put my laws in their hearts and write them on their minds.* ¹⁷He says: *Their sins and evil deeds I will remember no more.* ¹⁸So, if sins are forgiven, there is no longer need of any sacrifice for sin.

HEBREWS 10:1-18

Read: The proclamation reaches its highpoint, in the sacrifice of Jesus sins have been forgiven once for all. The sacrificial work of Jesus has passed. Jesus gives his followers access to the Father. They share in his priestly consecration. God no longer remembers sins.

Reflect: “It is by God’s will that have you have been sanctified” and “I will remember their sins no more.” What does this tell you about God? If God forgets sin, why do people seem unable to forget sins?

Pray: “Lord you told us” This is my Body given for you, this is my blood, the blood of the new covenant” help me to trust your love for all.

Act: Go to your church and pray in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Think about the meaning of the Eucharist in your life. Practice that which the Holy Spirit inspires you to do.

Be confident in God

¹⁹So, my friends, we are assured of entering the Sanctuary, by the blood of Jesus ²⁰who opened for us this new and living way, passing through *the curtain*, that is, his body. ²¹Because we have a high priest in charge of the house of God, ²²let us approach, with a sincere heart, with full faith, interiorly cleansed from a bad conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

²³Let us hold fast to our hope, without wavering, because he who promised is faithful. ²⁴Let us consider how we may spur one another to love and do good works. ²⁵Do not abandon the assemblies as some of

you do, but encourage one another, all the more, since the Day is drawing near.

²⁶If we sin willfully, after receiving knowledge of the truth, there is no longer sacrifice for sin, ²⁷but only the fearful prospect of judgment and of fire, which devours the rebellious. ²⁸Anyone who disregards the law of Moses is put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. ²⁹What, then, do you think it will be for those who have despised the Son of God? How severely shall he be punished for having defiled the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified, and for having insulted the spirit given to them? ³⁰For we know the one who says: *Revenge is mine, I will repay*. And also: *The Lord will judge his people*. ³¹What a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God!

³²Remember the first days when you were enlightened. You had to undergo a hard struggle in the face of suffering. ³³Publicly, you were exposed to humiliations and trials, and had to share the sufferings of others who were similarly treated. ³⁴You showed solidarity with those in prison; you were dispossessed of your goods, and accepted it gladly, for you knew you were acquiring a much better and more durable possession. ³⁵Do not now throw away your confidence that will be handsomely rewarded. ³⁶Be patient in doing the will of God and the promise will be yours: ³⁷*A little, a little longer—says Scripture—and he who is coming will come; he will not delay*. ³⁸*My righteous one will live if he believes; but if he distrusts, I will no longer look kindly on him*.

³⁹We are not among those who withdraw and perish, but among those who believe and win personal salvation.

HEBREWS 10:19-39

Read: Through Christ we live lives of faith, hope and love with which Christians encourage each other to love and good deeds. This life should not be abandoned for sin and be lost.

Reflect: Who encourages you to “love and good deeds”? Whom do you encourage?

Pray: Loving God help me to trust your mercy and hold fast to the hope of Christ.

Act: Look for people who have lost hope and need encouragement, and strengthen their faith with yours.

Remembering the heroes of faith

11¹Faith is the assurance of what we hope for, being certain of what we cannot see. ²Because of their faith, our ancestors were approved.

³By faith, we understand that the stages of creation were disposed by God's word, and what is visible came from what cannot be seen.

⁴Because of Abel's faith, his offering was more acceptable than that of his brother Cain, which meant he was upright, and God himself approved his offering. Because of this faith, he cried to God, as said in Scripture, even after he died.

⁵By faith, Enoch was taken to heaven, instead of experiencing death: *he could not be found, because God had taken him*. In fact, it is said that before being taken up, he had pleased God. ⁶Yet, without faith, it is impossible to please him: no one draws near to God without first believing that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him earnestly.

⁷By faith, Noah was instructed of events which could not yet be seen, and heeding what he heard, he built a boat in which to save his family. The faith of Noah condemned the world and he reached holiness born of faith.

⁸It was by faith that Abraham, called by God, set out for a country that would be given to him as an inheritance; for he parted without knowing where he was going. ⁹By faith, he lived as a stranger in that promised land. There, he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, beneficiaries of the same promise. ¹⁰Indeed, he looked forward to that city of a solid foundation of which God is the architect and builder.

¹¹By faith, Sarah herself received power to become a mother, in spite of her advanced age, since she believed that he, who had made the promise, would be faithful. ¹²Therefore, from an almost impotent man, were born descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven, as many as the grains of sand on the seashore.

¹³Death found all these people strong in their faith. They had not received what was promised, but they had looked ahead and had rejoiced in it from afar, saying that they were *foreigners and travelers* on earth. ¹⁴Those who speak in this way prove that they are looking for their own country. ¹⁵For, if they had longed for the land they had left, it would have been easy for them to return, ¹⁶but no, they aspired to a better city, that

is, a supernatural one; so God, who prepared the city for them, is not ashamed of being called their God.

¹⁷By faith, Abraham went to offer Isaac when God tested him. And so, he who had received the promise of God, offered his only son, ¹⁸although God had told him: *Isaac's descendants will bear your name.* ¹⁹Abraham reasoned that God is capable even of raising the dead, and he received back his son, which has a figurative meaning.

²⁰By faith, also, Isaac blessed the future of Jacob and Esau. ²¹By faith, Jacob, before he died, blessed both children of Joseph, and worshiped as he leaned on his staff. ²²By faith, Joseph, when about to die, warned the children of Israel of their exodus and gave orders about his remains.

²³By faith, the parents of the newly-born Moses hid him for three months, for they saw the baby was very beautiful, and they did not fear the order of Pharaoh. ²⁴By faith, Moses, already an adult, refused to be called son of Pharaoh's daughter. ²⁵He preferred to share ill treatment with the people of God, rather than enjoy the passing pleasures of sin. ²⁶He considered the humiliation of Christ a greater treasure than the wealth of Egypt, and he looked ahead to his reward. ²⁷By faith, he left Egypt without fearing the king's anger, and he persevered as someone who could see the Invisible.

²⁸By faith, Moses had the Passover celebrated, sprinkling the doors with blood so that the Destroyer would not kill their first-born sons. ²⁹By faith, they crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land, while the Egyptians, who tried to cross it, were swallowed by the waters and drowned.

³⁰By faith, the walls of Jericho crumbled and fell after Israel had marched round them for seven days; ³¹by faith, also, the prostitute Rahab escaped death, which befell the unbelievers, for having welcomed the spies.

³²Do I need to say more? There is not enough time to speak of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, as well as Samuel and the prophets. ³³Through faith, they fought and conquered nations, established justice, saw the fulfillment of God's promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴quenched raging fire, escaped the sword, were healed of their sicknesses; they were weak people who were given strength to be brave in battle and repulse foreign invaders.

³⁵Some women recovered their dead by resurrection, but there were others—persecuted and tortured believers—who, for the sake of a better

resurrection, refused to do what would have saved them. ³⁶Others suffered chains and prison. ³⁷They were stoned, sawn in two, killed by the sword. They fled from place to place, with no other clothing than the skins of sheep and goats, lacking everything, afflicted, ill-treated. ³⁸These people, of whom the world was not worthy, had to wander through wastelands and mountains, and take refuge in the dens of the land.

³⁹However, although all of them were praised because of their faith, they did not enjoy the promise, ⁴⁰because God had us in mind, and saw beyond. And he did not want them to reach perfection, except with us.

HEBREWS 11:1-40

Read: This section of the sermon is about faith, particularly the people of faith in the bible who trusted God even though their path forward was not clear to them.

Reflect: Faith is the guarantee of what you hope for. How is your faith? Are you aware of its richness and potential? Does it help in your life? Do you trust in the saving presence and action of God in your life? Study the stories of the Old Testament for examples of faith and courage.

Pray: Slowly and with great awareness pray the Our Father.

Act: Faith has to be lived and shared with others of your parish community. Faith has to be shared with others.

Accept the correction of the Lord

12¹What a cloud of innumerable witnesses surround us! So, let us be rid of every encumbrance, and especially of sin, to persevere in running the race marked out before us.

²Let us look to Jesus, the founder of our faith, who will bring it to completion. For the sake of the joy reserved for him, he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and then sat at the right of the throne of God. ³Think of Jesus, who suffered so many contradictions from evil people, and you will not be discouraged or grow weary. ⁴Have you already shed your blood in the struggle against sin?

⁵Do not forget the comforting words that Wisdom addresses to you as

children: *My son, pay attention when the Lord corrects you and do not be discouraged when he punishes you.* ⁶*For the Lord corrects those he loves and chastises everyone he accepts as a son.*

⁷What you endure is in order to correct you. God treats you like sons, and what son is not corrected by his father? ⁸If you were without correction, which has been received by all (as is fitting for sons), you would not be sons, but bastards. ⁹Besides, when our parents, according to the flesh, corrected us, we respected them. How much more should we be subject to the Father of spirits to have a life? ¹⁰Our parents corrected us as they saw fit, with a view to this very short life; but God corrects us for our own good, that we may share his holiness.

¹¹All correction is painful at the moment, rather than pleasant; later, it brings the fruit of peace, that is holiness, to those who have been trained by it.

¹²Lift up, then, your drooping hands, and strengthen your trembling knees; ¹³make level the ways for your feet, so that the lame may not be disabled, but healed.

Strive to be holy

¹⁴Strive for peace with all, and strive to be holy, for without holiness no one will see the Lord.

¹⁵See that no one falls from the grace of God, lest a *bitter plant spring up and its poison corrupt* many among you. ¹⁶Let no one be immoral or irreligious, like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal. ¹⁷You know that later when he wished to get the blessing, he was rejected, although he pleaded with tears.

¹⁸What you have come to is nothing known to the senses: nor heat of a *blazing fire, darkness and gloom, and storms,* ¹⁹*blasts of trumpets* or such a *voice* that the people pleaded that no further word be spoken. ²⁰For they could not endure the order that was given: *Every human or beast reaching the mountain shall be stoned.* ²¹The sight was so terrifying that Moses said: I tremble with fear.

²²But you came near to Mount Zion, to the City of the living God, to the heavenly Jerusalem, with its innumerable angels. You have come to the solemn feast, ²³the assembly of the firstborn of God, whose names are written in heaven. There is God, Judge of all, with the spirits of the upright brought to perfection. ²⁴There is Jesus, the mediator of the new

Covenant, with the sprinkled blood that cries out more effectively than Abel's.

²⁵Be careful not to reject God when he speaks. If those who did not heed the prophet's warnings were not spared on earth, how much more shall we be punished if we do not heed the One warning us from heaven?

²⁶His voice, then, shook the earth, but now he says: *Once more, I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.*

²⁷The words *once more* indicate the removal of everything that can be shaken, that is, created things, and only those that cannot be shaken will remain. ²⁸Such is the kingdom that we receive. Let us then be grateful, and offer to God a worship pleasing to him, with reverence and awe. ²⁹Our God is indeed a *consuming fire*.

HEBREWS 12:1-29

Read: This chapter is an exhortation to trust absolutely in Jesus. He is our inspiration and strength in difficult moments; he is our hope and our goal.

Reflect: How does suffering, your own and that of others challenge your faith? What does it mean for you to have "your eyes fixed on Jesus"?

Pray: Lord Jesus, may your cross inspire us to have absolute trust in you in difficult moments; give us the grace to confront them with serenity and patience; do not allow us to separate from you.

Act: Pray the five sorrowful mysteries of the Rosary.

Words of encouragement

13¹Let mutual love continue. ²Do not neglect to offer hospitality; you know that some people have entertained angels without knowing it. ³Remember the prisoners, as if you were with them in chains and the same for those who are suffering. Remember that you also have a body.

⁴Marriage must be respected by all, and husband and wife, faithful to each other. God will punish the immoral and the adulterous.

⁵Do not depend on money. Be content with having enough for today,

for God has said: *I will never forsake you or abandon you,*⁶ and we shall confidently answer: *The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?*⁷ Remember your leaders who taught you the word of God. Consider their end, and imitate their faith.⁸ Christ Jesus is the same today, as yesterday, and forever.

⁹Do not be led astray by all kinds of strange teachings. Your heart will be strengthened by the grace of God rather than by foods of no use to anyone.¹⁰We have an altar, from which those still serving in the temple cannot eat.

¹¹After the high priest has offered the blood in the Sanctuary for the sins of the people, the carcasses of the animals are burnt outside the camp.¹²For this same reason, Jesus, to purify the people with his own blood, suffered his Passion outside the Holy City.¹³Let us, therefore, go to him outside the sacred area, sharing his shame.¹⁴For we have here no lasting city, and we are looking for the one to come.

¹⁵Let us, then, continually offer, through Jesus, a sacrifice of praise to God that is the fruit of lips celebrating his name.¹⁶Do not neglect good works and common life, for these are sacrifices pleasing to God.¹⁷Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are concerned for your souls, and are accountable for them. Let this be a joy for them, rather than a burden, which would be of no advantage for you.

¹⁸Pray for us, for we believe our intentions are pure, and that we only want to act honorably in all things.¹⁹Now, I urge you all the more, to pray for me that I may be given back to you the sooner.

²⁰May God give you peace, he who brought back from among the dead, Jesus our Lord, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, whose blood seals the eternal Covenant.

²¹He will train you in every good work that you may do his will, for it is he who works in us what pleases him, through Jesus Christ, to whom all glory be for ever and ever. Amen!

²²Brothers, I beg you, to take these words of encouragement. For my part, I will add a few words.²³Know that our brother Timothy has been released. If he comes soon, I will visit you with him.²⁴Greetings to all your leaders and to the saints. Greetings from those in Italy.

²⁵Grace be with you all.

HEBREWS 13:1-25

Read: The final part of the sermon is about relations between human beings. The importance of mutual love, hospitality to strangers, the sacredness of marriage and avoiding love of money are highlighted as visible signs that faith is focused on Christ Jesus, the High Priest.

Reflect: What does this last chapter of the letter to the Hebrews tell you? What does the following text tell you: “Do not neglect good works and common life for these are sacrifices pleasing to God” (v. 16)?

Pray: O God, who makes us participate in the priesthood of your Son, help us live a life caring for others and pleasing to your eyes.

Act: Help your parish efforts to support married couples, care for immigrants and build unity.