

The Active and Passive Obedience Of Christ our High Priest

Luke 22:63-71, Oculi Sunday (Lent III)
March 3, 2013

Beloved of the Lord.....In the Old Testament, a priest was a person who offered up sacrifices to God, first for his own sins, then for the sins of the people. By the multitude of sacrifices those priests offered in the Old Testament, God was teaching man one very important thing: man could never sacrifice enough to atone for sin. What God really desires in a sacrifice is a willing heart, namely a sacrificial heart which loves God, seeking nothing but His glory. This is something we as men can never do. For every time man tries to offer something to God in sacrifice for payment of sin, man is doing this only for himself. Every good work is a bribe in God's sight, and God accepts no bribe. In all the world, there has really been only one sacrifice with the power to move and turn God's own heart, and that was the willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. When God in heaven looked upon His own Son, suffering, bleeding, dying, making a selfless and sacrificial atonement for our sins, God's own heart was in upheaval. God's heart through Jesus was turned from wrath against men, to favor for all men. When we then in this life are weighed down by our sins, discouraged and weary, we need only think of one High Priest who offered up Himself to bring us into God's good favor, Jesus Christ the Lord. The Bible says, "Wherefore in all things it behoved [Jesus] to be made like unto *his* brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people"...."And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

I. The active obedience of Christ. Christ was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane sometime between 1AM and 2AM in the morning. Before Christ was brought to Pilate Friday morning, there were at least two, if not three trials held by the Jews. We know the High Priest Annas had a private trial with Jesus first, and this was before Peter's threefold denial. Annas was the former high priest, and also the father-in-law of Caiaphas the official ruling high priest. During this trial with Annas, messengers were sent out to gather and assemble the Jewish counsel together named the Sanhedrin. Imagine then their hatred for Christ, to hold a trial in the middle of the night to condemn Him! It also generally believed both Annas and Caiaphas lived in the same large palace which had a courtyard in the middle. This was where Peter warmed himself by the fire. It is John who tells us that Annas "asked Jesus of His disciples and of His doctrine" and Jesus answers, "I spake openly to the world: I ever taught in the synagogue and in the temple... and in secret have I said nothing." This was when "one of the offices which stood by Jesus struck Jesus with the palm of his hand" to which Jesus answered, "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smiteth thou

me?" After this trial Jesus is sent bound unto Caiaphas, presumably in another part of the palace.

This second trial around 2AM or later, was the official trial of Christ before Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin. Not only had the council assembled by this time, but they also sought and found false witnesses who could not agree. After Christ confesses to be the Son of God, Caiaphas rents his clothes in hypocrisy, as if Jesus has spoken blasphemy. Matthew then tells us, "Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote *him* with the palms of their hands, Saying, Prophesy unto us, thou Christ, Who is he that smote thee?" It is likely that after this second trial, Jesus is held in the courtyard by the soldiers before yet another trial at daybreak. From both Matthew and Mark (Mt. 27:1-2, Mk 15:1) it certainly appears another trial was held by Caiaphas very early in the morning at daybreak, and Luke in our text today clearly says, "And as soon as it was day, the elders" [ect.] "came together and led him into their council saying Art thou the Christ? Tell us." This third trial was more for the sake of appearance and in agreement with Jewish law and regulation.

"Art thou the Christ? Tell us!"...this is what they demanded. If Christ here answers YES, in their unbelieving eyes He has spoken blasphemy. In His first answer Jesus says, "If I tell you, ye will not believe" and this was certainly true. For three years by word and deed Christ had confessed to them He was the world's Savior, saying, "I am the light of the world". In John seven Jesus said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." Even today all those who seek to be forgiven their sins should stop their silly works of sacrifice, and believe in the one good work which has power to save, the willing sacrifice of Jesus Himself, our great High Priest. If we wish to be saved, we need only hear His Word and believe as Jesus said, "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life."

Since God would have all men to be saved, Jesus now testifies under oath for the sake of the world, His true identity, so no one doubts but all believe. When they said again "Art thou then the Son of God?" Jesus answered, "Ye say that I am", which is the same as saying, "You've said it!" Mark records Christ here simply saying "I am". We have here the sworn testimony of Jesus under oath, to be the True God, "begotten of His Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten not made, Being of one substance with the Father." Jesus is the "I AM THAT I AM" of sacred Scripture, who also said, "Before Abraham was, I am" or as Micah said, "whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" or as Isaiah said, "Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace." The verdict of the Jews, that Jesus had committed blasphemy, likewise proves Jesus confessed to be True God. In Matthew 26 we find the Jews saying, "Behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of

death."

By this open and honest confession of Christ, Jesus is our High Priest, actively obeying and fulfilling God's law as our Substitute. Our catechism teaches, "As my Priest, Christ fulfilled the Law in my stead perfectly (active obedience)". If we were to be saved from death and hell for those many times we have broken our word or lied to our fellow man, Christ would have to live the perfect and holy life we never did, and always speak the truth. Of Jesus our High Priest the Bible says, "Such an High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens." Most notably today we emphasize His active obedience by a truthful and honest confession, and also the words He didn't speak. Though these trials were unjust, a sham, a show, blasphemous in themselves, Jesus didn't open His mouth once in complaint. Whereas we throughout lives have behaved just like Annas, Caiaphas, and the others, in that we have lied and borne false witness and put the worst construction on everything regarding our neighbor, Jesus never lied, was never cruel, never judged when it was not His place, never put the worst construction on everything, and most importantly Jesus never complained, even when He endured the greatest injustice of all, man's justice against the Son of God. Isaiah writes, "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth." In His meekness and humility then, even by His silence we should see Jesus fulfilling the law as our Substitute. Through Jesus God can now say of every believer, "This is my good and obedient child, who has never once complained."

II. The passive obedience of Christ. This brings us to what is called the Passive Obedience of Christ. Here our catechism says "As my High Priest" [Jesus] "sacrificed Himself for me (passive obedience)". When we speak of the Passive Obedience of Christ, we speak of all Jesus suffered for our sins in willing obedience to God the Father. This includes not only His later suffering of hell on the cross for our sins but also all the suffering Jesus endured at the hands of Annas, Caiaphas, and the soldiers. First they "mocked Him and smote Him" striking Him with their fists. Then they put a blindfold on his hand and gave Him a hard blow, as if Jesus didn't know who hit Him. Jesus also felt the many blows from many palms, the sting upon His cheek, yet He turned the other cheek, as we should do also that we may be children of our Father. If we then were to be delivered from our own cruelty to our fellow man, Jesus would have to endure the cruel nature of man Himself, even with a willing heart, and love alone for God the Father and even the men who smote Him. The Father wanted to save us to, and so the Father above allows His own Son to be slapped and beaten and mocked that the evil of our own hands might be undone, and the cruel words of our mouth forgiven. Throughout the night from 2AM onward, the soldiers took pleasure in His pain, yet the deepest stroke that pierced Him was the stroke that justice gave.

All of this puts our own life into perspective. If Jesus willingly endured all this for us, what will we endure for Him? Even if our Father grants us 100 years of pure misery on earth, what is this in comparison to the eternal bliss of heaven, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory." And even now if we think of all those saints above us who suffered terrible and unspeakable things below, where are they now and do they suffer any more? Yet our comfort is not in the saints, but in Christ suffered all things for the saints, even the sins of the whole world. Yet the whole world does not make it to heaven, only believers do. Therefore do as Jesus commands you, deny yourself, and "Take up the cross and follow Me." Jesus will never lead you astray, but by this cross He leads you to the sure glories of heaven. Rest assured, if He gives you a cross, He will likewise give you the strength to bear it, for "by grace are ye saved" and that "not of yourselves." And though it is surely true, we are nothing like Jesus when it comes to complaint, our sins of complaint are also forgiven by His blood, and this silent Lamb is in no wise silent when He declares His eternal love for us saying, "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." Knowing such, we in no wise fear our cross, but we happily reach for it and grab it and joyfully carry it till we reach our heavenly home. Where is this home? It is where the Son of God lives and reigns even now, at the "right hand of the power of God." Therefore surely, whatever suffering He allows us here by His power, such will surely lead us to that crown of glory above. What glory then "is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God. For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps." Run this race with patience dear believer, your crown of glory awaits. Amen.