

# FOOD FOR THE JOURNEY

15<sup>th</sup> – 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2023

## Saints this Week

19<sup>th</sup> January

*St Wulstan, Religious, Bishop*

---

**St Wulstan** (1008-1095), also known as 'Wulfstan', was a Benedictine monk at Worcester, eventually becoming Bishop in 1062. Uniquely amongst bishops, he retained his See through and beyond the Norman Conquest. Wise and benevolent, he rebuilt the cathedral, reformed the 3diocese, and tried to stop the Bristol slave trade, in which English slaves were sold to Norse traders in Ireland.

---

### Collect

**FILL** us, we pray you, Lord our God, with that spirit of charity which burned in the heart of Saint Wulstan, your Bishop: that, as he honoured you by faithful service of your poor, so by the help of his poverty we may live lives of service and of charity, and attain to the blessed life of your kingdom. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

---

21<sup>st</sup> January

*St Agnes, Virgin, Martyr*

---

**St Agnes** (*ob. c.304*) came from a noble Roman family and, according to legend, was about 13 when she suffered martyrdom. She was stabbed in the throat when she refused to marry a pagan. *Agnes* in Greek means 'chaste' and is related to the Latin word *agnus*, a lamb, both of which are apt associations for one who was innocent, vulnerable, and young.

---

## **Collect**

**ALMIGHTY** ever-living God, who choose what is weak in the world to confound the strong: mercifully grant, that we, who celebrate the heavenly birthday of your Martyr, St Agnes, may follow her constancy in the faith. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, for ever and ever.

---

## Week 2 (Year 1)

---

### Monday of Week 2 (1)

#### Reading

*Hebrews 5:1-10*

*Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered*

Every high priest chosen from among men is appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. <sup>2</sup> He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness. <sup>3</sup> Because of this he is bound to offer sacrifice for his own sins as well as for those of the people. <sup>4</sup> And one does not take the honour upon himself, but he is called by God, just as Aaron was.

<sup>5</sup> So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who said to him,

**'You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you';**

<sup>6</sup> as he says also in another place,

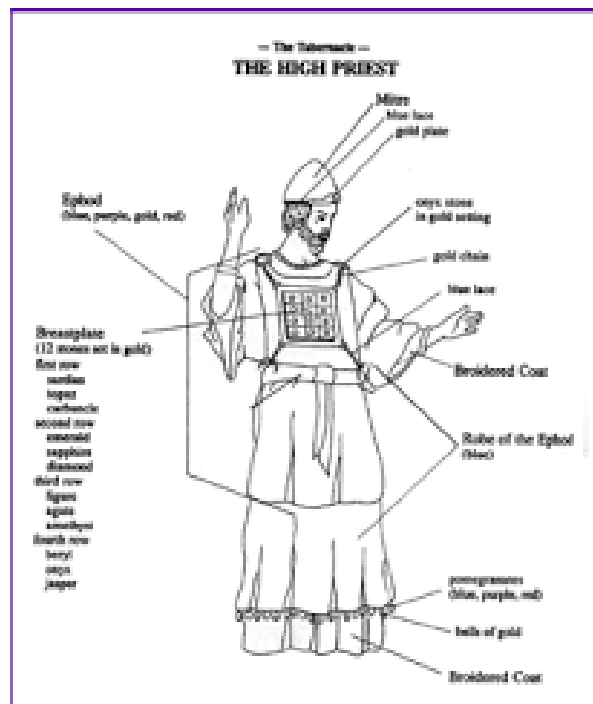
**'You are a priest for ever,  
after the order of Melchiz'edek.'**

<sup>7</sup> In the days of his flesh, Jesus, offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear. <sup>8</sup> Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; <sup>9</sup> and being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, <sup>10</sup> being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchiz'edek.

#### Reflection

**THE CONTRAST** between the Jewish High Priest - 'chosen from among men' and 'appointed to act on behalf of men in relation to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins' – and Jesus, the Son of God, appointed by God himself is sharply drawn. The High Priest, chosen by his peers for the task, is temporary, beset by his own weakness, and therefore having to offer sin-

offerings on his own behalf as well as on behalf of others. Like Aaron, the earthly high priest is chosen from among the living (Sirach 45:16). We see this process of selection in Lev 8:2 with reference to Aaron and his sons and similarly in Num 8:6 with reference to the Levites. By contrast, quoting Ps 2:7 and Ps 110:4, the writer speaks of Jesus the High Priest as God's Son, appointed by him, and as a priest after the order of Melchiz'edek. We shall hear more about Melchiz'edek later on, but for now we note that whereas there are generations of priests after Aaron's line, Melchiz'edek was a one-off. The order of Melchiz'edek, because it is unique, is therefore an eternal model. From this follows, the High Priesthood of Christ is unique and eternal. He is not chosen from among mortals, his offering is once and for all, and his offering for sin is not on his own behalf, because, of course, he is without sin.



## Tuesday of Week 2 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 6:10-20*

#### *The Certainty of God's Promise*

God is not so unjust as to overlook your work and the love which you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do. <sup>11</sup> And we desire each one of you to show the same earnestness in realizing the full assurance of hope until the end, <sup>12</sup> so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

<sup>13</sup> For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, <sup>14</sup> saying, 'Surely I will bless you and multiply you.' <sup>15</sup> And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise. <sup>16</sup> Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. <sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that through two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible that God should prove false, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to seize the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner shrine behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest for ever after the order of Melchiz'edek.

### Reflection

**THE EPISTLE** to the Hebrews holds before us the holiness of God, 'the unchangeable character of his purpose'. It encourages us not to be sluggish but to be 'imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises'. There is no going back to how things were – no second repentance is possible. Instead, we need to keep moving on 'to seize the hope set before us'. The writer identifies two unchangeable things. The first is God's word and the second is God's oath. In fact these two things really amount to the same: God's word is so trustworthy that it has the status of an oath. God's oath is trustworthy because he can swear by nothing greater than himself because he is supreme. God's faithfulness can be tracked back to the promise he made to Abraham, a promise reinforced by his word and his oath. Our hope in God has this as its context

but is now focused on Jesus who goes beyond the curtain to act as the High Priest. The curtain is what conceals the Holy of Holies from our view – as with the Jewish Temple – and, for our purposes, it is the boundary between death and life which Jesus has crossed through his death and resurrection. As for Melchiz'edek, we heard a bit about him yesterday and we shall be hearing more about him tomorrow.

## Wednesday of Week 2 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 7:1-3, 15-17*

#### *The Priestly Order of Melchizedek*

**7** For this Melchiz'edek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him; **2** and to him Abraham apportioned a tenth part of everything. He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace. **3** He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.....

**15** This becomes even more evident when another priest arises in the likeness of Melchiz'edek, **16** who has become a priest, not according to a legal requirement concerning bodily descent but by the power of an indestructible life. **17** For it is witnessed of him,

**'You are a priest for ever,  
after the order of Melchiz'edek.'**

### Reflection

**WE HEAR** about Melchiz'edek not only in the Letter to the Hebrews but also during the Mass in the Roman Canon. The story which begins this passage comes from Genesis 14, here as found in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. At this point in the Genesis story Abraham is still called 'Abram' and he acknowledges the priestly blessing from the Melchiz'edek by paying tithes to him. As we discover with the Old Testament priesthood as it emerges after Moses' meetings with God on Mount Sinai, the priesthood is sustained by a tithing population. At the end of the reading we have another mention of Melchiz'edek, the quotation from Ps 110:4 where he is cast as a Messianic figure. The Church, following

Hebrews, sees the priesthood of Melchiz'edek as foreshadowing that of Christ, not only because of the Messiah imagery, but because in both cases priesthood involves the offering of bread and wine. This takes us beyond the animal sacrifices and sin-offerings of the Temple. There are extra layers of symbolism in that Melchiz'edek is given various titles: 'King of righteousness', 'King of Salem', and 'King of Peace', all of which are appropriate titles for Christ. Furthermore the mysterious figure from pre-history is said to be without father or mother or genealogy. Like Christ he has no beginning and no end.

## Thursday of Week 2 (1)

### Reading

*Hebrews 7:25 - 8:6*

#### *Mediator of a Better Covenant*

<sup>25</sup> Jesus is able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them.

<sup>26</sup> For it was fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens. <sup>27</sup> He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself. <sup>28</sup> Indeed, the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect for ever.

**8** Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, <sup>2</sup> a minister in the sanctuary and the true tent which is set up not by man but by the Lord. <sup>3</sup> For every high priest is appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices; hence it is necessary for this priest also to have something to offer. <sup>4</sup> Now if he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all, since there are priests who offer gifts according to the law. <sup>5</sup> They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly sanctuary; for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, 'See that you make everything according to the pattern which was shown you on the mountain.' <sup>6</sup> But as it is, Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises.

## Reflection

**WE HEARD** earlier in the argument (Heb 2:10) that it was 'fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering'. We now hear that it is 'fitting that we should have such a high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens' (Heb 7:26). In other words, it was fitting for God that Jesus should be made perfect through suffering and fitting for us that Jesus be a sinless High Priest. We discover through this something of the mystery of suffering. Suffering is not just what happens to us: there is suffering in the heart of God. God was and is never imperfect but his perfection is partly explained by the suffering which in Christ he freely chose to undergo. As for the role of High Priest, we learn from the Torah, the Jewish Law, what the task of the High Priest is. He is a mediator, one who makes sin offerings on behalf of the people and on his own behalf. The High Priest, thus understood, was temporary: there was a succession of them. He is also a flawed human being: his sin offerings are partly on his own behalf and not a perfect offering for the people. So not only are there, over the course of time, many high priests, but there are whole cycles of sacrifice, involving less than perfect means – the blood of bulls and goats – to achieve at best temporary ends. Nonetheless, this system of sacrificial worship was a copy – an imitation, a type, a shadow – of the heavenly worship. What the system needed, and what it found in Jesus, was a perfect High Priest who could make the offering just the once. Furthermore it becomes a perfect offering, using the perfect means. The perfect sin-offering, the perfect atonement – at-one-ment – is the God-Man Jesus offering his own life, made perfect – that is, complete – through suffering. We edge towards an understanding of this awesome mystery but, as is the case with mysteries, we cannot finally grasp it. It is truly awesome because we cannot grasp it.



# Friday of Week 2 (1)

## Reading

*Hebrews 8:6-13*

*A New Covenant with the House of Israel*

Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. <sup>7</sup> For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion for a second.

<sup>8</sup> For he finds fault with them when he says:

**'The days will come, says the Lord,  
when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel  
and with the house of Judah;**

**<sup>9</sup> not like the covenant that I made with their fathers  
on the day when I took them by the hand  
to lead them out of the land of Egypt;  
for they did not continue in my covenant,  
and so I paid no heed to them, says the Lord.**

**<sup>10</sup> This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel  
after those days, says the Lord:**

**I will put my laws into their minds,  
and write them on their hearts,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.**

**<sup>11</sup> And they shall not teach every one his fellow  
or every one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'  
for all shall know me,  
from the least of them to the greatest.**

**<sup>12</sup> For I will be merciful toward their iniquities,  
and I will remember their sins no more.'**

<sup>13</sup> In speaking of a new covenant he treats the first as obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.

## Reflection

**WE REFER** to the Old Testament and the New Testament, the two parts of the Bible. At Mass we read more of the New than of the Old, despite the fact that the Old is about three-quarters of the Bible and the New only about

a quarter. 'Testament' is simply an old word for 'covenant' and a 'covenant' is a solemn and binding agreement. When we look through the 'Old Testament', the Hebrew Scriptures, we discover that there is more than one 'covenant' within it. There was a covenant with Noah, a covenant with Abraham, a covenant with Moses, a covenant with David. And more besides. Nonetheless, it is the covenant with Moses which most concerns us, and this is what the Letter to the Hebrews calls 'the first covenant'. God leads his people from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land – from death to life. The covenant is negotiated primarily on Mount Sinai – the Ten Commandments and the whole system of priesthood and sacrifice are given to Moses there – and much of the Hebrew Scriptures is viewed through the prism of obedience and disobedience. Disobedience – the failure of the people to be able to keep their side of the bargain – is the rationale given for the collapse of kings, for exile, subjugation by foreign empires, and tragic outcomes of one kind or another, especially with regard to Jerusalem, the Temple and capital. Contained within the Old Testament are promises of renewal and redemption, new outcomes. What Hebrews quotes here is from the prophet Jeremiah (31:31-34), as given in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament. It is a very clear statement of the hope of salvation – a glorious future for God's people after the calamity of the Jewish Exile in Babylon. Christians interpret that glorious future not in terms of the rather chequered history of Judaism after the Return from Exile, a history of subjugation by one empire after another, but in the coming of Christ, not as a conquering warrior-king but as one who establishes a new covenant, a new agreement.

## **Saturday of Week 2 (1)**

### **Reading**

*Hebrews 9:2-3, 11-14*

*Let us be confident in approaching the throne of Grace*

A tent was prepared, the outer one, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence; it is called the Holy Place. <sup>3</sup> Behind the second curtain stood a tent called the Holy of Holies... <sup>11</sup> But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) <sup>12</sup> he entered once for all into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves but his own blood, thus securing an eternal

redemption. <sup>13</sup> For if the sprinkling of defiled persons with the blood of goats and bulls and with the ashes of a heifer sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, <sup>14</sup> how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

## **Reflection**

**WE HAVEN'T** finished yet with Hebrews: there are another couple of weeks of readings at weekday Mass from that dense theological treatise, more a sermon than a letter. Nevertheless today's reading is a suitable place to take stock. We are comparing the apparatus of the Holy Place and its ceremonies and customs with what is achieved by the Priesthood of Christ. The Jewish Temple had a series of courts, each leading to a more exclusive enclosure – rather like, if you go to the Buckingham Palace Garden Party, you find that within the hallowed precincts there are further enclosures into which only certain people are admitted. The most exclusive enclosures in the Jerusalem Temple were the Holy Place and, beyond that, the Holy of Holies, where only the High Priest could go, and then only once in the year, on the Day of Atonement. Christ the High Priest enters the Holy Place just once – once and for all – and the redemption he achieves is not through animal sacrifice but through the shedding of his own blood. The further contrast is that the annual Atonement sacrifice serves for the purification of the flesh, whereas the sacrifice of Christ purifies our consciences, and re-vivifies us in God's service. The annual sacrifice was flawed. The eternal sacrifice of Christ is without blemish. Some of this symbolism helps us to understand our own Church architecture, or better still, the architecture serves to remind us of the theology. Our altars, at St Mary's and St Patrick's, are set within a sanctuary, the 'Holy Place'. That is where the sacrifice of the Mass is celebrated – about which there will be more to say. Beyond and behind the altar, in both churches, is the Tabernacle – the word is the same as 'tent' – the Holy of Holies, where Christ is eternally present to his people. His presence is marked for us by a light which is kept burning, a light shining in the darkness and not overwhelmed by it.