

“JESUS, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST, ENCOURAGES US!”

Hebrews 4:14-16

Dear People of God,

The Hallmark card company is gearing up for big business about this time of year. They have to be licking their financial chops at the approaching holidays. Besides Mother’s Day and Easter, this must be their busy times. I would think they are flooding the store shelves with **Halloween cards**, **Thanksgiving cards**, and of course, the granddaddy of them all: **Christmas cards**. Though we live in a digital age where greetings can be sent via email or text or Twitter, there still is nothing like opening mail containing a greeting and the signature of its sender.

One of the larger sections on the Hallmark shelves is the “**Sympathy card**” section. Obviously, they offer nice thoughts to send someone who has suffered a loss of a loved one. But you’ll also find cards in that section that just offer encouragement to the recipient...encouragement in times of illness, or troubles, or loneliness, or just to assure someone that you’re thinking of them. Sometimes, you lift the spirits of people in just letting them know that you are thinking of them. They appreciate that.

Our dear Lord does that same for us today, and I hope we appreciate that too. The focus of our Lord’s greeting to us today is to remind us who He is and what He has done so that we can find some inner peace in the midst of our trials and temptations.

So let’s open His card today and hear how...

“JESUS, OUR GREAT HIGH PRIEST, ENCOURAGES US!”

1. To firmly hold on to the faith we profess
2. To boldly approach Him in our times of need

1

The author of the book of Hebrews is unknown. Suffice it to say that the Holy Spirit inspired its author to write these words primarily to Jewish converts to Christianity who were very attached with the O.T. rules and law. In fact, they were almost so attached to OT rituals that it was hard to connect Jesus to their faith. Instead of living the freedoms of the Gospel, these people were in danger of suffering a relapse back to Judaism and those O.T. laws.

So to point them to Jesus, the writer emphasizes how it is Jesus who is their **GREAT HIGH PRIEST**. These people knew the O.T. high priests, Aaron and the tribe of Levi. They had great respect to them. They knew the high priest officiated at the Jerusalem temple. He was the only one who was allowed to enter the Most Holy Place 1x per year on the Day of Atonement to offer up sacrifices for the people’s sins. That made the High Priest the top official in the Jewish faith.

Now how about the Christian faith? Our text reads: **THEREFORE SINCE WE HAVE A GREAT HIGH PRIEST WHO HAS GONE THROUGH THE HEAVENS, JESUS THE SON OF GOD, LET US HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITH WE PROFESS**. The writer is saying, there is another High Priest, the only one of His kind who is truly great because He is Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He did not come to earth **through a thick curtain of some ornate temple**, but He has come from heaven’s exalted throne at the right hand of God to live on earth to be the Savior, the Messiah, the Redeemer of all mankind! He is the Son of God, born in the flesh, of a sinful mother, yet without sin Himself. He arrived on this earth’s scene to offer up sacrifice, (not one after the other day after day after day), but to offer up Himself as **THE ONE PERFECT SACRIFICE** for all sins of all sinners!

That is the general theme of Hebrews. And now Jesus encourages these Jewish converts through these words to **HOLD FIRMLY TO THE FAITH WE PROFESS**. The Greek word for “hold on to” can refer to the grasping of a person just as Jesus did when he **literally grabbed the hand** of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law who was suffering from a high fever. Mk 1:31 says: **So Jesus went to her took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.**

In a similar vein, Jesus encourages us through our text **to firmly hold on to the faith we profess**. This “**holding on**” is that **spiritual conviction** that the Holy Spirit has put into our heart. Jesus encourages us to hold on to His truths so that we refuse to let go of what we believe and profess, that no matter what the devil, the world, or our own sinful flesh throws at us, I’m going to hold on much like holding on to a precious new-born baby. We just will not let go of the truth of Jesus **who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried**. By the power and help of the Spirit, we will not let go of the truth that **Jesus descended into hell, and on the 3rd day, He rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of God, only to return one day to judge the living and the dead.**

Jesus has dotted every “i” and crossed every “t” to complete His mission of giving up Himself **as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world**. Here in worship today in God’s house, we hear the Word and receive the sacrament for our strength to firmly hold on to the faith we profess. **These means of grace empower us** to grab on to this faith and hold it tightly like holding that newborn. We wouldn’t dare to think of dropping that baby. We’d do anything – including suffering injury first – before allowing

injury to that child. That's the kind of trust, the kind of holding on Jesus encourages us to have throughout our lives. And the only way we have that trust is through God's Word and sacraments – doing what we're doing right now so that the Spirit can strengthen our faith in our Dear Savior!

2

When we speak of Jesus seated on His exalted throne in the heavens, might we be tempted to think He is too distant, too indifferent to our troubles, trials, and temptations in life? Not so, for [Jesus, our great High Priest encourages us to BOLDLY APPROACH HIM IN OUR TIMES OF NEED.](#)

FOR WE DO NOT HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO IS UNABLE TO SYMPATHIZE WITH OUR WEKNESSES, BUT WE HAVE ONE WHO HAS BEEN TEMPTED IN EVERYWAY, JUST AS WE ARE – YET WAS WITHOUT SIN. LET US THEN APPROACH THE THRONE OF GRACE WITH CONFIDENCE SO THAT WE MAY RECEIVE MERCY AND FIND GRACE TO HELP US IN OUR TIME OF NEED. These are compelling words for these Jewish converts. They remember how the O.T. people were not allowed into the Holy of Holies of the temple. They had to stand outside while the priest took their sacrifice and offer it for them. That was their access to God – through the high priest.

But now that is all changed. We have a Great High Priest in Jesus who first is able to sympathize with our weaknesses. He doesn't just know about our trials/troubles, he identifies with them. He experiences our struggles, he "feels their emotions". He is not oblivious to our weaknesses because Jesus was tempted in every way just as we are. **Jesus, as true Man, was a red-blooded male** with natural male desires, but he never lusted. He grew tired, but was never lazy. He was frustrated, but never lashed out. His schedule was full, but he always took time to worship. **He knows hunger, exhaustion, stress, and hated.** He knows what it was like to lose a friend, to be betrayed by another, to be attracted to the opposite sex, to think evil thoughts of revenge, to get burned out. He knows pain, distress, suffering, rejection, loneliness, and bitterness. There is nothing we experience today that Jesus hasn't been tempted by or experienced before. Even in the dusty plains of wilderness, the devil bombarded Jesus with temptation.

The difference is: **JESUS remained WITHOUT SIN.** Yes, "he's been there, but he never did that." Paul says it best in 2 Cor 5:21: **God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** That means Jesus lived a perfect life for us who couldn't. Our giving in to every temptation deserves eternal punishment forever in hell. God's judgment of death is just for all of us. But Jesus kept the Law for us, so his death spelled forgiveness of sins. God removed our curse and penalty, and put it all on Christ. Jesus paid our punishment on His cross and removed all our guilt that angered God.

So now Jesus, that Great High Priest, [encourages us to boldly approach Him in our times of need.](#) We don't need earthly priests or pastors to plead our case. We can speak directly to God to find His mercy (compassion) to help us with our day-to-day battles with Satan and temptations. Through His Spirit, we can bring all our prayers and petitions before His throne of grace knowing that we have His sympathy, we have his grace, we have his love to help us through those countless days of "what are we gonna do now?" or "how will we ever get through this?" or "how long will this suffering last?" or "will we make it?"

Remember, the Lord is watching over you, right now! You are not on your own. He is at your hearts and blessed you [with a faith to firmly hold on to.](#) He wants you to [approach Him](#) as **boldly and confidently** as children approach their dear fathers.

Your Lord is waiting for your call for mercy, your cry for help in your time of need. [That's encouragement from Jesus, your Great High Priest!](#) And that's better than any words in a Hallmark card. **AMEN**