

Jesus knows

I. He knows what we're going through

II. He knows how to help

*Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.*

What comes to mind when you hear the word “empathy?” Being compassionate? Being understanding? Putting yourself in someone else’s shoes? Trying to see things from a different point of view? Or maybe you think about when you were going through a tough time and wanted to talk about it, and someone did a poor job of showing you empathy. They said the usual phrases like “Oh just cheer up” or “You’ll get past this,” without being empathetic to your situation. They failed to understand what you were going through. They just didn’t get it... The writer to the Hebrews talks about Jesus our Great High Priest not as someone who is so far off from us where he is unable to stoop to our level and sympathize with our weaknesses and temptations. No! Jesus knows. He knows what we’re going through, and more importantly, he knows how to help.

The writer to the Hebrews writes with an overarching theme in his letter: “Christ is better.” He makes many points such as how Christ is better than the angels. Christ is better than Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the patriarchs. But the portion of the letter that our text for today is from focuses on how Christ is better than the Old Testament priests. In fact, Christ is described as our Great High Priest. This would have met the Hebrews on their level because they knew more about high priests than we do today. Allow me to put it in to perspective, because comparing Jesus to the Old Testament high priests is quite interesting.

They both offered sacrifices on behalf of sinners. Both of their positions were bestowed by God, not taken up by themselves. They are both human. They both offered prayers to God.

But the differences highlight that Christ is indeed better. Old Testament priests were sinners and Jesus was not a sinner. The OT priests offered continuous sacrifices as opposed to Jesus’s one sacrifice. Old Testament priests had a temporary priesthood and Jesus has an eternal priesthood. Jesus was the source of salvation. It is clear when comparing the two that Christ is indeed better!

It is evident throughout the entire letter that the Hebrews were undergoing some persecutions. We are not told exactly what it was, but it was significant. It was getting to the point where they began to consider whether or not faith in Jesus was worth it. They were tempted to return to Judaism, leaving Christianity behind. Hearing about Jesus in this way must have been music to the ears of the Hebrew congregation.

The writer to the Hebrews wanted to make a point perfectly clear: *“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses.”* It’s no fun being persecuted for our faith. I’m sure the Hebrews were feeling a little bit overwhelmed by it. Jesus knew that then, and he knows it now.

Let’s shift the focus from the Hebrews to us. We just heard about how much better Christ is than the Old Testament Priests: how he is much more powerful, eternal, and wiser than any who lived. Does it sometimes seem that Jesus is so much better than us, that he is so far off that he does not know us? That he does not know our situation? That he does not know what we go through? How can Jesus empathize with *my* weaknesses?

Jesus was perfect in every way! He was a pure lamb without any blemish. He never sinned. He never gave in to any temptation! He did miracles unlike anyone has ever seen! While I on the other hand have plenty of blemishes. I sin every day. I constantly give in to temptation! I can’t do any miracles! I don’t even understand it sometimes! Paul’s words in Romans chapter seven magnify exactly what I am talking about: *“I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.”* Our state of sinfulness and temptation is so real for us.

How can Jesus sympathize with my weakness? These kinds of doubts lead us to come to the false conclusion that he can’t sympathize with my weakness. That he doesn’t care about me. The devil likes to whisper thoughts like that in our ears. He likes to drop off a priority mail delivery of fresh new temptations on our doorsteps. Then he proceeds to tell us that Jesus is so much better than us, he doesn’t understand our weakness. Even the weaknesses we are most ashamed of. He leaves us with an endless list of doubts:

*“These temptations just do not seem to stop!”* Jesus knows!

*“For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do!”* Jesus knows!

*“I know I repented for this particular sin over and over again, but I fell back into it again!”* Jesus knows!

*“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.”*

We are reminded from our Scripture reading that Jesus knows! During Jesus’s ministry on earth, He experienced firsthand all the temptations we also endure on this earth. We are told of how Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil. The only difference is he did not sin, nor did he have the desire to sin!

He knew what we were going through so well, he knew what he had to do to save us from our sin. He took all of our sins on his back and carried that immense burden uphill to his death. That innocent Lamb of God did the only thing possible to save us from our sins!

Jesus lived a perfect life because we couldn't. Jesus resisted every temptation because we couldn't. Jesus suffered the pains of hell so we wouldn't. Not only does he empathize and understand what we are going through, he gives us the solution for our temptations! The only solution for our temptations!

Jesus rose from the grave after dying for our sins, and then he ascended into heaven. Think about it: when we say the Apostle's Creed, we confess that Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. That means something powerful. The right hand is a position of authority and a position of power. Jesus has the power to intercede for us when we are tempted and when we give in to temptation.

He is the one who sways God's justice. The marks in his hands and the wound in his side are a constant reminder to our heavenly Father that He paid the ultimate price for us and for our salvation. Jesus reminds His Father that even though we are not perfect, He was perfect for us! The wrath of God is satisfied with that.

But the solution does not stop there! *"Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."*

Because Jesus has the highest position of power and authority, he has the power to send the Holy Spirit down from the Throne of Grace. The Holy Spirit goes to work on us through the Word of God and the sacraments, creating this fire in our hearts.

That fire is a powerful one. It gives us the ability to say "No!" to the temptations of the devil. He gives us the gear that we need to fight against the devil and his constant attacks.

That Throne of Grace is always open for us to approach! For it is there, and only there, where we receive mercy and where we find grace from God. God helps us in our time of need.

So, when you committed that sin again, go. Go to the Throne of Grace! Jesus knows, and Jesus is the only one who can help you. When you are persecuted, go to the Throne of Grace. When you are lonely, go to the Throne of Grace. When you are tempted, go to the Throne of Grace. Because Jesus knows!

Jesus gave the only solution for us when we are tempted. He knows exactly what we are going through, and he knows exactly how to remedy it. Jesus knows! Jesus has empathy in the purest and most wholesome extent. But He didn't stop there! He went the extra mile for us with his ultimate solution.

The devil and his temptations have been defeated by our Great High Priest. Satan will still chase after us and try to get us to doubt, but he chases with a limp. Because even if devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us. We tremble not,

we fear no ill. He cannot overpower us. This world's prince may still, scowl fierce as he will. He can harm us none. He's judged, the deed is done. One little word can fell him: Jesus. And Jesus knows. Amen.