

Monday 18th January 2021

Week 2 in Ordinary Time

Hebrews 5:1-10, Mark 2:18-22



Art credit: El Greco; *Prayer of Jesus in the Garden*, Toledo Museum of Art Ohio.

Today's first reading from the letter to the Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is the fulfilment of all the Old Testament high priests who were selected by lot to offer sacrifice. On the feast of Atonement, the high priest would sprinkle the blood of animals in the Holy of Holies, the most sacred part of the temple, but beforehand he would offer prayers and entreaties to God expressing sorrow for his own and the peoples' sins. This picture of Jesus' agony in the garden by El Greco, shows one such instance of Jesus' prayer to His Father, when He pleaded that "if it were possible this hour might pass from Him" (Mk. 14:35). The author of the letter to the Hebrews refers to the fact that His prayer was heard, and this needs to come as some comfort for us. How often have we prayed, and our prayers seem to have not been heard? On the surface, Jesus was not "saved" from the dreadful death He suffered, but the grace of the Holy

Spirit (indicated by the angel here) would have helped to sustain Him in His Passion (c.f. Lk. 22:43) and as we know, He rose from the dead as death could not hold Him (c.f. Acts 2:24).

In His prayer in the garden, Jesus prayed to the Father, as a Son. Note here in the picture, El Greco has placed Jesus kneeling on His blue cloak. In Sacred Art, Jesus often wears a red garment and a blue cloak; red to indicate His human nature and the blue cloak to indicate His divine nature. Here Jesus is praying in His human nature, praying for another way to achieve our salvation, but He is kneeling on the blue cloak, and is supported by it. So, He adds “yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk. 14:36). This is what we pray every time we pray the “Our Father”. We ask the Father that His will be done in our lives and in doing so, pray with Jesus, offering up entreaties to be saved from evil.

Note the womb-shaped rock on the left which shows the disciples asleep – they could not stay awake and pray with their Lord (Mk. 14:37). They had just feasted and were full of wine and food, but the time will come for them to fast when their Lord will be taken away from them. At times of extreme sorrow, we don’t feel like eating so fasting comes naturally. However, although fasting as a discipline is not easy, many people find it an immensely helpful practice to focus their minds on Christ. Fasting is prayer and when we fast, we are united in Jesus’ prayers and entreaties to the Father (c.f. Heb. 5:7), making them our own.

