

Rev. Paul. Hottinger

**Invited into the High Priestly Role Holy Saturday Night: The Easter Vigil/A**

April 19, 2014 8:00 PM **Gn 1:1—2:2; Gn 22:1-18; Ex 14:15—15:1; Is 54:5-14; Is 55:1-11; Ez 36:16-17a, 18-28; Rom 6:3-11; Mt 28:1-10** (We will renew ourselves by renewing our understanding of where we are coming from and where God is leading us.)

You may believe that the vigil is rather long, but it used to be worse. We have records of a vigil in Rome in the fifth century where three thousand adults were baptized and confirmed, while the people in the cathedral sang and read and sang and read and sang and read—this won't take that long.

The whole sweep of **tonight's liturgy is connecting everything together from the origin of the creation itself to the time of Christ**, including the call of Abraham and the vision of the prophets, and the giving of the Law and, and, and, on and on. **Everything is fulfilled in Christ, in one way. And yet in another way in Christ there is something completely new and unexpected**; and these two truths we have to keep together. Sometimes it's hard to keep together all of the ideas that are suggested in such a liturgy as ours. I think it's like trying to push a wheelbarrow full of little stones up an incline and not lose any stones. It isn't always easy. **But it is the connection of everything that creates the wonder and the beauty and the awe that feeds our faith.**

As early Christians looked back into the past, they saw **many aspects of Judaism, Jewish worship, as foreshadowing Jesus**. In particular they were very taken with the idea of the high priesthood. Now **the high priesthood really began with Moses in a vision he had on Mount Sinai**, a mystical vision of a heavenly temple in which there was this minister doing something hard to explain, creating somehow **reconciliation** between God and humanity, **communicating** somehow God's interest in his creation, **performing rituals or rites of purification called atonement**. This was later put into actual material form in the tabernacle, the tent, carried about in ancient times and later in the actual stone Temple built in Jerusalem. However, by that time the high priest had become a politician and the whole original idea was lost, or at least most of it.

**The early Christians believed that Jesus had taken on that role, whatever it was, that high priestly role of reconciling, of communicating, of purifying.** And they believed that

he had **shared that role with them**. And so when they performed Baptism, they performed it in such a way as to copy the rite of atonement on Yom Kippur, involving the stripping off of clothes and the washing in the laver and then the vesting with new clothes, white clothes, and entering into the holy of holies with the offering that was to purify the people. And Christians believe that's what Jesus does, and not only does Jesus do that, but he invites us to participate in that, that **every baptized Christian has a role to play** in bringing reconciliation to the world, that we are called on to communicate to the world the goodness of God and his goodwill toward the world, his anxiety even toward the world. That is a baptismal office: sharing in the high priesthood of Christ.

And that's not all, because in the Temple there was a table with bread on it called **showbread**. That bread **represented the presence of God in the growing of food**, so that the feeding of people was seen as a gift of God. **Food was observed as a sacred thing**. All this part of the Temple in the **symbolism and the imagery of that Temple, all of it was incorporated into Christian belief in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist** because the early Church saw that Jesus was the one who is the real bread that feeds not only the body, but the soul and the spirit that longs for something more than material. They saw in Jesus' body something to give life. And, again, it was the priest on the sabbath who consumed the showbread so that it would not spoil.

Now tonight we will also wash our candidate for Baptism and she will put on a new garment and she will enter into the holy of holies when she comes to the altar to receive the body and blood of Christ, which makes the holy of holies out of our own bodies, as Christ sanctifies the world through us, as Christ sanctifies the world beginning with us. And she will be playing this high priestly role even tonight as she takes the bread of life, the body of Christ broken for us, but raised from the dead. So tonight we celebrate our beginnings, our origin, and **we will renew ourselves by renewing our understanding of where we are coming from and where God is leading us**.