Hebrews

Questions for Personal Reflection or Small Group Study

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Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture

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# God’s Final Word (Hebrews 1:1–4)

1. Hebrews tells us that God’s revelation through his Son Jesus Christ is different from the ways God revealed himself in the old covenant. What is new about God’s revelation in Christ? How should our response be different from that of Israel?

2. Hebrews 1:2 states that God has spoken to us through his Son. What are some ways God has spoken to you personally?

3. Which part of the description of Jesus in Hebrews 1:1–4 most resonates with you? How does this description relate to your own identity and destiny as a son or daughter of God?

4. Express in your own words what Hebrews 1:1–4 reveals to you about Jesus’ mission. What does his mission have to do with your life?

5. What does this passage say about how Jesus reveals the Father’s character? How can we as Christians imitate Jesus and display God’s character to the world?

# Far Superior to the Angels (Hebrews 1:5–14)

1. The author’s main argument in this section is for Jesus’ divinity. Can you think of other New Testament passages that reveal that Jesus is God? Supposing Jesus were not truly God, what difference would this make for us?

2. This section highlights some of God’s promises in the Old Testament and demonstrates how Jesus fulfills them. In what ways has God been faithful in keeping his promises to you personally?

3. Hebrews makes clear that God alone is worthy of our worship. What things are we tempted to put before God in our own lives? What is the result?

4. Hebrews 1:10–12 cites Psalm 102, which speaks of God’s transcendence. What does it mean that God is transcendent? How can this truth give us more confidence in God in our daily lives?

# A Little Lower Than the Angels (Hebrews 2)

1. According to Hebrews, what are some consequences of failing to “attend . . . to what we have heard” (2:1)? What steps can you take to avoid the dangers of apathy in the Christian life?

2. How can you respond personally to the exhortation to accept the “great salvation” announced to us by the Lord (2:3)? From what does this “great salvation” save us?

3. Have you witnessed or personally experienced any signs, wonders, acts of power, or gifts of the Holy Spirit (2:4)? How do these give “testimony” to the good news of our salvation?

4. Who are some people who have handed down the faith to you as John did to Polycarp and Polycarp to Irenaeus? (See sidebars on pp. 54 and 55.) Where do you have opportunities to play this role for others?

5. The author’s main argument in this chapter is for Jesus’ humanity. If Jesus were not truly man, what difference would it make for us?

6. Jesus is “not ashamed to call [us] ‘brothers’” (2:11). Are there times when you have been “ashamed” to acknowledge Jesus before others? How can you proclaim his name more courageously in your daily relationships?

7. Do you notice ways in which the “fear of death” (2:15) affects you? How does the fact that Jesus tasted death for us change you in this regard?

# Pilgrims and Partakers (Hebrews 3)

1. Hebrews 3 begins by calling Jesus our “high priest.” What difference does Jesus’ priesthood make in our relationship with God?

2. In Hebrews 3:7 the author applies Psalm 95 to his readers and to us today. Are you aware of any ways that you resist hearing God’s voice? What lessons can you learn from the failures of the exodus generation?

3. What are some examples of how sin is deceitful (3:13) and can lead to a hardening of one’s heart?

4. Why does lack of faith lead to disobedience? What are some concrete ways that you can more fully obey God’s voice?

5. What steps can you take to encourage yourself and others daily, while it is still “today” (3:13)? Who are some people who do this for you?

6. Hebrews explains that the Israelites were not able to enter God’s rest because of their unbelief. Are there any ways you might be limiting the Lord’s work in your life because of unbelief? Do you need to ask God to increase your faith?

# Rest for the People of God (Hebrews 4)

1. What does it mean that the promise of entering God’s rest “remains” (4:1)? How can we take care that none of our fellow Christians should fail to enter that rest?

2. Do you find it true that the deepest meaning of life is found not in work but in communion with God? How can you use the Christian Sabbath (Sunday) to cultivate deeper communion with God?

3. Have you experienced God’s word as living and effective (4:12)? What are some ways that the word of God has changed you, consoled you, convicted you, or counseled you?

4. Does having a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses give you confidence to “approach the throne of grace” (4:16)? Why or why not?

5. How can you respond on a daily basis to Hebrews’ exhortation to “receive mercy” and “find grace for timely help” (4:16)?

# Jesus Our Great High Priest (Hebrews 5:1–10)

1. What does Hebrews 5:1 name as the essential characteristics of a priest? How does Jesus fulfill each of them?

2. Hebrews says that Jesus did not glorify himself in becoming high priest (5:5). What are some examples in the Gospels that show Jesus’ humility? How can we imitate his example and use our accomplishments to glorify not ourselves but our Father in heaven?

3. Hebrews uses Psalm 2 and Psalm 110 to explain Jesus’ identity. What do these psalms tell us about Jesus’ relationship to God? What can they teach us about our own relationship to God?

4. How did Jesus respond to his suffering (5:7–8)? What are some situations of suffering in your life to which you can apply his example?

# A Call to Maturity (Hebrews 5:11–6:20)

1. Based on this section, what do you think the Christian community addressed in Hebrews was like?

2. Can you think of times when your faith was immature or unstable, or your spiritual ears were sluggish (5:11–13)? What was the result? What growth have you seen in your spiritual life in the last few months or years?

3. Does the description of Christian life in Hebrews 6:4–5 resonate with your experience? How would you describe your own experience of the realities the author is speaking about?

4. How does Hebrews 5:11–14 build on the teaching of Jesus and Paul? In what ways can you become less child*ish* and more child*like* in your relationship with the Lord?

5. Hebrews 6:3 says the author and his readers will advance to maturity “if only God permits.” Who is an example of a mature Christian to you? In what areas do you need to ask for God’s grace to help you grow to maturity in Christ?

6. Hebrews 6:11–20 mentions hope, the “anchor of the soul,” several times. How strong is your hope in Christ? What causes your hope to be tested? What causes it to be strengthened?

# The Priesthood of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7)

1. Hebrews 7 points out that Melchizedek exemplifies two great qualities of the promised Messiah: righteousness and peace. How did Jesus exemplify these qualities? How can you bring the righteousness and peace of Jesus into situations of stress or conflict in your daily life?

2. Hebrews 7:10 makes the odd statement that Levi was still in Abraham’s loins when he tithed to Melchizedek. In what ways have you noticed the deep interconnectedness of human beings—how the actions of others influence you, and vice versa?

3. What does Hebrews mean by “the order of Melchizedek”? What does it have to do with King David? Why is it important to us?

4. Jesus is a priest forever by God’s oath, in contrast to the levitical priests who “were prevented by death from remaining in office” (7:23). What logical conclusion does Hebrews 7:25 draw from the fact that Jesus does not die but “lives forever”? What does this mean for us?

5. Jesus offered a sacrifice for sins “once for all” because he “offered himself” (7:27). What does his “once for all” atonement for sin imply for your relationship with God?

# The True Tabernacle and the New Covenant (Hebrews 8)

1. Hebrews 8 begins by stating the central truth that we do indeed “have such a high priest” as the one described in chapter 7. What are some passages in the Gospels that support the description of Christ in Hebrews 8:1–2?

2. How is our access to God different from that of God’s people in the old covenant?

3. What does Hebrews say is different about the new covenant promised in Christ as compared with the first covenant? What was wrong with the first covenant?

4. What does it mean to have God’s law written on our hearts instead of on tablets of stone? Have you experienced this in your own life?

5. What phrase in Hebrews 8:7–13 most strikes you regarding the covenant that God will make with his people? What does this teach us about our own identity?

# God’s Answer to the Problem of Sin (Hebrews 9)

1. Why was the first covenant unable to deal with the problem of human sin? How would you summarize God’s answer to the problem of sin as laid out in Hebrews 9?

2. What difference does Christ offering “his own blood” (9:12) as opposed to the blood of animals make in the effectiveness of his offering? Do you ever call on the power of Christ’s blood in times of need? What effects do you experience?

3. Christ “entered . . . into the sanctuary” (9:12). Why did he need to do this if he is the eternal Son of God? What does this statement refer to in the events of Christ’s life?

4. What does Hebrews 9:14 tell us about the purpose of Christ’s offering with regard to us? What difference does this make in your life?

5. What insight do you gain from the analogy between a covenant and a will in Hebrews 9:15–22?

6. Why is it that “without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (9:22)? Do you find it a difficult truth to embrace? What does it imply about the effect of sin on human life and relationships?

7. What does Hebrews 9 teach you about God’s love for you personally?

8. Do you “eagerly await” (9:28) Christ’s return? How can you do so more eagerly?

# We Have Been Sanctified Once and for All (Hebrews 10:1–18)

1. Hebrews lays out three stages of salvation history: the law, grace, and glory. How did the previous stage of the law prepare us for the present stage of grace? How does the present era of grace help us prepare for the coming era of glory?

2. Hebrews 10:2 implies by contrast with the old covenant sacrifices that we who have been cleansed by the sacrifice of Christ “no longer have any consciousness of sin.” What impact does a deeper awareness of freedom from guilt have on your relationship with the Lord? How can you use this truth as a tool for evangelization?

3. What does Hebrews’ citation of Psalm 40 teach us about the disposition required for a pleasing sacrifice? How does Jesus’ conduct during his passion exemplify this disposition?

4. What does the contrast in verb tense between Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14 show us about our current status before God and the goal toward which we are striving?

5. How can you imitate Jesus’ example of obedience to the Father’s will in fulfillment of Psalm 40? In what areas of your life do you find this particularly challenging?

6. How can the Mass be understood as a sacrifice in light of the statement that Jesus’ sacrifice was “once for all” (10:10) and that “there is no longer offering for sin” (10:18)?

# Confidence to Enter God’s Presence (Hebrews 10:19–39)

1. Read through Hebrews 10:19–39 and note what attitudes it recommends in light of Christ’s work of redemption. Which of these attitudes do you most need? How can you actively cultivate this in your daily life?

2. In what ways do you respond to Hebrews’ encouragement to “approach” God in worship, both individually and corporately?

3. Hebrews 10:22 says we have been “washed” and “sprinkled.” What does the Old Testament context of “washing” and “sprinkling” reveal about our identity in Christ?

4. Hebrews tells readers to “hold unwaveringly to our confession that gives us hope” (10:23). In what situations or relationships might the Lord be calling you to publicly bear witness to Christ? How can you take advantage of those opportunities?

5. Who are the people in your life who “rouse [you] to love and good works” (10:24)? How can you fulfill that role in the lives of others?

6. What does the author prescribe as the antidote to the danger of apostasy he warns of in 10:26? To what extent is this antidote in place in your life?

7. How does Hebrews 10:26–31 depict the consequences of rejecting God? How can a proper understanding of hell further our missionary efforts to those who have turned away from Christ?

# In Praise of Faith (Hebrews 11)

1. What does the definition of faith in Hebrews 11:1 add to your previous understanding of faith? How does this definition compare to some common contemporary views of faith?

2. Which biblical example of faith in Hebrews 11 is most illuminating to you? Why? How can you imitate this person’s faith?

3. What does it mean to be a pilgrim or sojourner on earth (11:13)? In what ways do you experience this?

4. In what ways have you most experienced God’s faithfulness in your life?

5. How has your faith been tested by trial or persecution? How has it grown through that experience?

6. Who is a contemporary example of faith to you? What have you learned from that person?

# The Discipline of a Loving Father (Hebrews 12)

1. What does it mean for us that Jesus is the “leader and perfecter of faith” (12:2)?

2. Are you aware of areas of your life in which you are entangled by sin or attachment to worldly things? What steps can you take to “rid [yourself] of every burden and sin” (12:1)?

3. What connection does Hebrews make between our perseverance in running the race and Jesus’ own endurance? How does the end result of Jesus’ endurance encourage you to endure in him?

4. What insight does Hebrews 12:5–6 give you in regard to suffering in the Christian life? What suffering is there in your present life? How does Hebrews help you respond?

5. What can parents learn from God the Father’s example of discipline? What can children learn?

6. Hebrews exhorts readers to “strive for peace with everyone” (12:14). Are there relationships in your life that are not characterized by peace? How can you bring the peace of Christ into those relationships?

7. What can we learn from the example of Esau, which Hebrews uses as a contrast to the previously mentioned heroes of faith (12:16–17)?

8. How would you describe in your own words the heavenly Jerusalem that is depicted in Hebrews 12:22–24? How is this different from common ideas about heaven?

# Pleasing Sacrifices in Day-to-Day Life (Hebrews 13)

1. Hebrews 13:1 exhorts us to “let mutual [brotherly] love continue.” Do you think of other Christians as truly your brothers and sisters? How can you honor the Lord by showing love and affection for other Christians?

2. Hebrews 13:2 picks up on the teaching of Jesus to welcome strangers (Matt 25:35). How have you experienced Christian hospitality? How can you respond to Christ’s invitation to show hospitality to others?

3. How can you honor the exhortation to be “un-money-loving” and “content with what you have” (13:5)?

4. Is there any other part of the moral exhortation in 13:1–6 that the Lord is calling you to personally apply to your life?

5. “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (13:8). Does this assurance give you confidence in Jesus’ provision and care for you? In what circumstances or world events can this be a source of comfort? How can you use this truth to witness to those who find themselves in situations of turmoil and distress?

6. Hebrews 13:14 says “here we have no lasting city, but we seek the one that is to come.” Does your life reflect this truth? How can it do so more fully?