

HEBREWS 2:14-18

DIVINELY HUMAN

Today is the Sunday for the celebration of the Presentation of Jesus in the Temple. It's an easy day to remember, for me at least, because it's on February the 02nd, which is also known as Groundhog Day. So, if it helps you, whenever you see the groundhog presented, let your thoughts drift back to Jesus. Now, we read the Gospel reading for this day recently on December 29th. Forty days after Jesus was born His parents brought Him into the temple and presented an offering for Him in the form of two turtle doves.

However, for today I'd like to present Jesus to you not as an infant, but as an adult – a Divinely Human adult, and that's why I read the Gospel reading for the Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany. There you heard about Jesus teaching in the Synagogue, casting out a demon in the Synagogue, healing Peter's mother-in-law who was sick with a fever, and healing a lot of other people who were sick with various diseases. And then He left that area saying that He must preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns.

These are all good things to present to people about Jesus, His miraculous acts and His teaching of the Good News, and yet I wish to focus more on the human side of Jesus, and look at Him through the lens of our text from Hebrews, which begins with Jesus sharing in our flesh and blood. I also wish to do this by reflecting on Jesus through the words of various Church fathers and Reformers. You may not recognize their names, and that's fine, I only mention them to give them credit, and to show that this is how the larger Christian Church has thought about Jesus for most of our history.

Athanasius said that for salvation a correct faith is necessary in regards to both Jesus' divine and human natures. Hilary said that there's no hope of salvation with only one nature of Jesus and not the other. You need both of them, and you need correct faith in both. Augustine said that Christ didn't die for the one who does not know Christ as true man, because He died according to His humanity, and thus you are justified only through the blood of Jesus.

Those are the church fathers. A Lutheran reformer by the name of Martin Chemnitz wrote, "Of such importance it is to recognize rightly the human nature in Christ. For in the flesh of Christ God condemned sin, and in the body of His flesh we are reconciled. We are justified in His blood. He has laid down His life as a ransom for many. The Son of God is born of a woman in order that we who were under the Law might be redeemed and receive adoption. He does not blush to call us brothers, because He has been made a partaker of flesh and blood. In short, every spirit which does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God but is the spirit of antichrist. But he who eats the flesh of the Son of God and drinks His blood has eternal life, for His flesh is given for the life of the world."

And that's what I want to present to you from Jesus, His flesh and blood that the reformers and church fathers so highly praised and valued. We're human beings. We're of flesh and blood, and our physical nature is still part of God's creation that He once proclaimed to be very good. Yet, this once very good physical nature of ours is now corrupted by sin. So, Jesus came to redeem us from this sin by becoming and remaining a real human being.

Jesus didn't have to do that. Jesus was fully God in heaven, and yet for our salvation He also became fully Man. Our Lutheran teaching from the Formula of Concord says that Jesus "did not receive a foreign nature, but our own flesh in the unity of His person. In this way He has become our true Brother. . . . Christ redeemed human nature as His work, sanctifies it, raises it from the dead, and gloriously adorns it as His work (FC Ep I 5-6).

Consider the importance of Jesus becoming flesh and blood from this perspective. Without being fully human the Son of God would not have been able to die. We all face death because of our sins. The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23a). Jesus as God didn't deserve to die, but as man He willingly chose to die as the sacrifice for the sin of the world. Jesus' death then faced God's judgement against sin for us and absorbed it. Jesus knew no sin, and yet He bore all sin and its condemnation of death on the cross. There Jesus destroyed the power of sin and death which hung over all humanity.

Paul told Timothy that God "saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of His own purpose and grace, which He gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:9-10)

Jesus abolished the power of eternal death over you through His death on the cross, and now He brings you life and immortality through this Gospel message. This Good News message that Jesus referred to in our Gospel reading, and that He now preaches to you through me, brings you life.

And just as Jesus defeated Sin and Death on the cross, He also defeated the devil. Luther wrote, "The devil's work is to crush us under his feet and, because of our sin, to dispatch us from life into death. . . . [Christ's] works are truly divine works such as: to justify, to restore to life, to save" (LW 13:135). As death is defeated, so is Satan, and Jesus is victorious over all precisely because He is both God and Man.

Therefore, we jump to verse seventeen of our text, "Therefore He had to be made like His brothers in every respect." In order to redeem human beings Jesus had to be fully human, He had to be flesh and blood. Gregory of

Nazianzen, another church father, wrote, “that which is not assumed He has not healed; but that which is united to His Godhead is also saved”.

What our text then goes onto state is that Jesus was, and is, a real human being who has shared in every aspect of human life, including the temptation to sin. Jesus didn’t become partly human, or share only parts of our human experience. Jesus embodies everything that it means to be truly human. Yet, He is a perfect human, very good as God first created us to be. We are sinfully corrupted humans, not good anymore. The saying, “To err is human” is wrong. Perfect humans do not err. Jesus did not err. He did not sin.

Read another two chapters and you’ll read, “We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). This is the tension that we see in Jesus that He mysteriously holds together. Fully God and fully man. The ultimate High Priest, and yet tempted – flesh and blood like us, and yet without sin.

As High Priest Jesus can pray directly to God the Father for us. You don’t need any other intercessor, no angels, saints, church fathers, or reformers – only Jesus. As this ultimate High Priest, who is also flesh and blood, Jesus understands the reality of our human weaknesses. Never think that Jesus doesn’t understand you, or care about your problems.

Think back to our Gospel reading. Jesus healed a demon possessed man, which is dramatically great. Then He turned around and healed someone with a fever, which is still a great thing to do, but on the scale of things, one person has the sniffles and the other is tormented by a demon. I’d pick having the sniffles and be content that Jesus is off doing important things like battling demons, but in the midst of His teaching the gospel and battling demons, Jesus turns around and sees you have a cold and offers to help you with that. Jesus shared our human experiences and truly understands our plight. We don’t talk much about that when we present Jesus to people, but that is Jesus – fully God, and fully Man.

What we focus more on, and rightly so, is Jesus’ greatest work as High Priest. Jesus mercifully reconciled sinners with God. His perfect human life, His sacrificial death, and His victorious resurrection removes the stain of sin from us, and brings all believing humans into a right relationship with God the Father.

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, You became human to be our Saviour. You delivered us from slavery to the fear of death and have called us, and all Your people, brothers. Bless us and strengthen us so that we may turn from our sin, trust in You, and rejoice in all You have done for us. Amen.