

Biblical Theology of the Priesthood



The Catholic Priest and the Bible

jbergsma@franciscan.edu

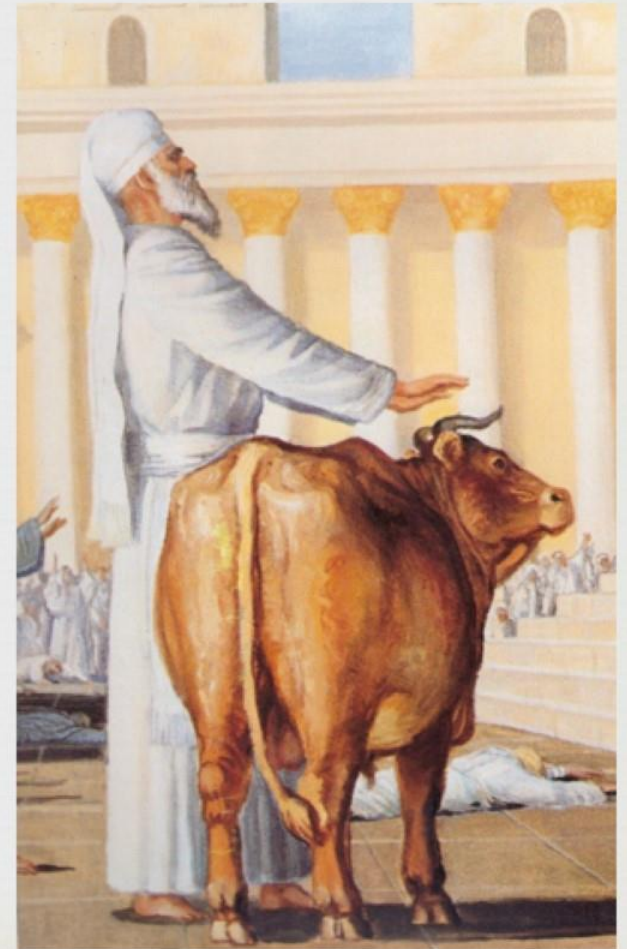
www.JohnBergsma.com

www.TheSacredPage.com

The Priesthood in Scripture



- ❧ What is a priest in Scripture?
 - ❧ A mediator between God and his creatures (esp. His people), who maintains the covenant relationship.
 - ❧ The priest represents creation to God and God to creation
 - ❧ Toward God he is a Son, toward the creation/people his Father.



History of Priesthood



❧ Adamic Priesthood

- ❧ **Gen 1:26:** “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...”
- ❧ **Gen 5:3:** “Adam became the father of a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth”
- ❧ Priesthood is a natural expression of divine filiation, of sonship



History of Priesthood



✧ Adamic Priesthood

✧ **Gen. 2:15** The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till (Heb. *work*) it and keep (Heb. *guard*) it ...

✧ **Num. 3:7** The Levites shall perform duties (Heb. *guard the guardianship*) for him and for the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, as they minister (Heb. *work the work*) at the tabernacle."



History of Priesthood



✧ Adamic Priesthood

- ✧ So how does that “guarding” work out?
- ✧ **Gen. 3:1** Now the serpent was wiser than any beast of the field that the Lord God had made, and he said to the woman
- ✧ **Gen 3:6** “She took from its fruit and ate, and even gave some to her husband *who was with her*, and he ate.”



History of Priesthood



- ✧ Cain kills Abel, a better priest
- ✧ Priesthood is obscured by growth of human sin up to flood

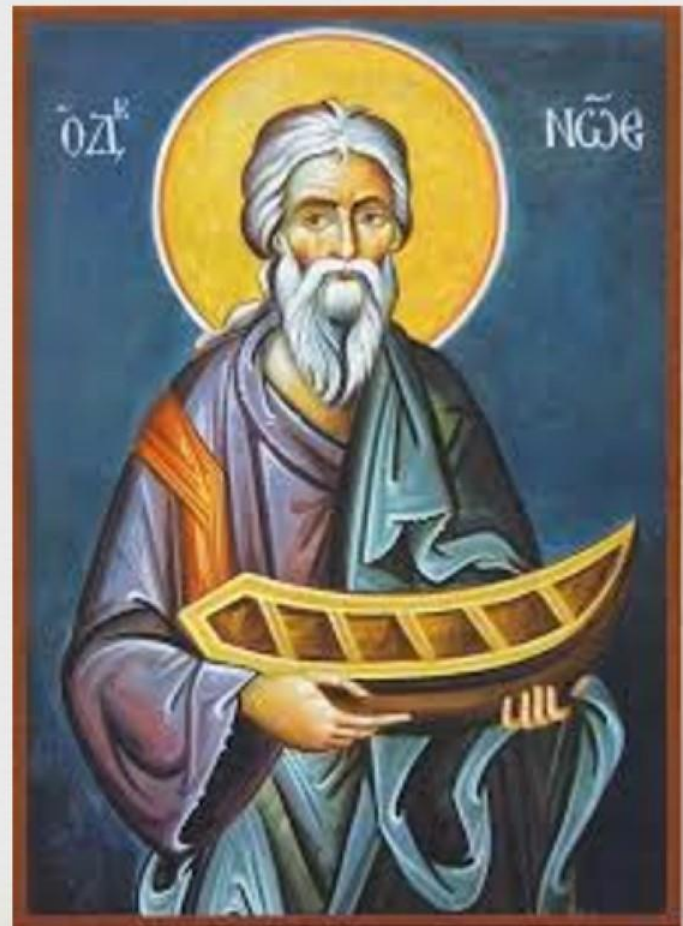


History of Priesthood



✧ Noahic Priesthood

✧ **Gen. 8:20** Then Noah *built an altar* to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and *offered burnt offerings* on the altar.

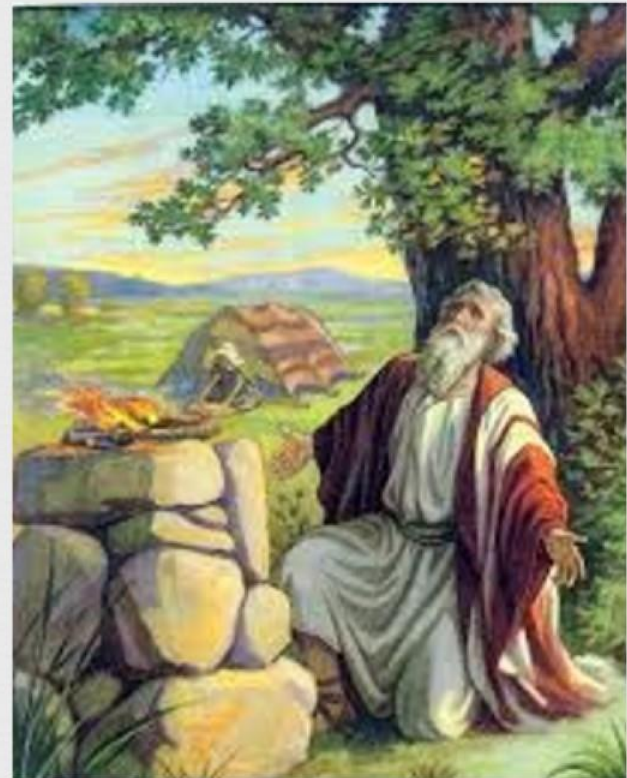


History of Priesthood



✧ Abrahamic Priesthood

✧ **Gen. 12:8** Thence he removed to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there *he built an altar to the LORD and called on the name of the LORD.*



History of Priesthood



✧ Melchizedekian Priesthood

✧ **Gen. 14:18** And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was priest of God Most High. **19** And he blessed him and said, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; **20** and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!” And Abram gave him a tenth of everything.



History of Priesthood



❧ **Targ. Pseudo-Jonathan:** Then the righteous king, who was Shem the son of Noah, king of Jerusalem, came out towards Abram, and he brought out for him bread and wine. (Gen 14:18)

❧ **Targ. Neofiti:** Then Melchizedek the king of Jerusalem, he was Shem the Great, brought out bread and wine, and he was a priest serving in the high priesthood before God Most High.



History of Priesthood



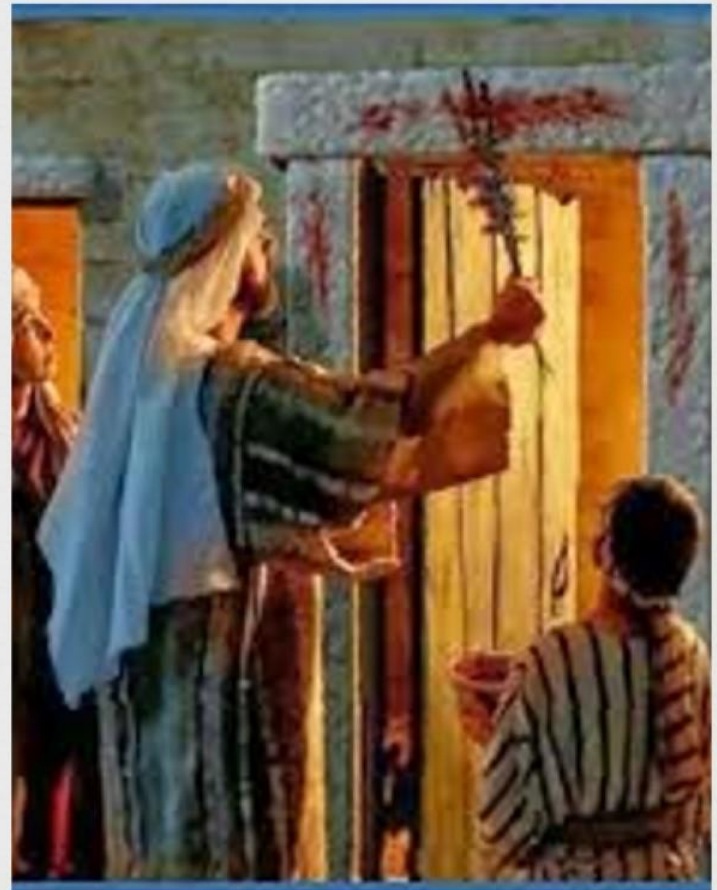
- ❧ “Hunc Melchisedech, aiunt Hebraei fuisse Sem filium Noe, et vixisse usque ad Isaac. Et omnes primogenitos, a Noe ad Aaron, sacerdote fuisse” (*PL* 198. 1094-95).
- ❧ “The Hebrews said that this Melchizedek was Shem son of Noah, and that he lived until Isaac. And all the firstborn from Noah to Aaron, were priests.” (*Glossa Ordinaria* on Gen 14)
- ❧ Priesthood fades from view in the silent years when Israel is in Egypt

History of Priesthood



❧ The Ministerial Priesthood of the Firstborn

❧ Ex. 13:2 “Consecrate to me all the **firstborn**; whatever is the first to open the womb among the people of Israel, both of man and of beast, is mine.”



History of Priesthood



❧ The Priestly People of Israel

❧ **Ex. 19:5** Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant... **6** ... you shall be to me a **royal priesthood** (or “kingship of priests”) and a holy nation.”

❧ **Ex. 24:4** And Moses ... built an altar at the foot of the mountain, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. **5** And he sent **young men of the people of Israel**, who offered burnt offerings and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen to the LORD.

History of the Priesthood



History of Priesthood



❧ The Levitical Priesthood

❧ **Ex. 32:25** And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose ... **26** then Moses ... said, “Who is on the LORD’s side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him.

History of Priesthood



❧ The Levitical Priesthood

❧ **Ex. 32:27** And he said to them, “Put every man his sword on his side, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother....” **28** And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses; and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men. **29** And Moses said, “*Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the LORD...*”

History of Priesthood



❧ Levites Replace Firstborn as Ministerial Priests

❧ **Num. 3:12** “Behold, I have taken the Levites from among the people of Israel *instead of every first-born* that opens the womb among the people of Israel. The Levites shall be mine, 13 for all the first-born are mine; on the day that I slew all the first-born in the land of Egypt, I *consecrated for my own all the first-born in Israel*, ... they shall be mine: I am the LORD.”

History of the Priesthood



❧ Characteristic duties of the priests:

❧ **Authoritative interpretation of the law:**

❧ Deut. 17:8-10 “If any case arises requiring decision between ...one kind of legal right and another, then you shall arise and ... to the Levitical priests...and they shall declare to you the decision.

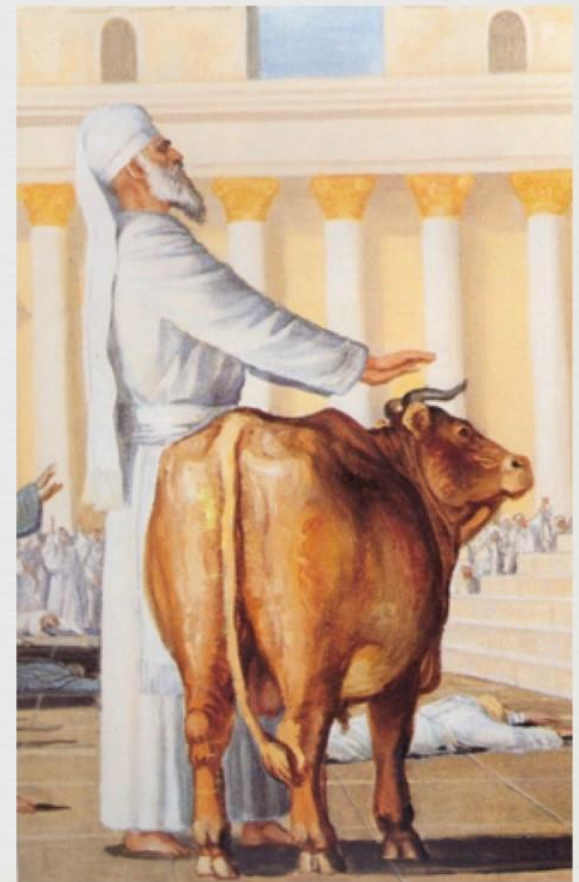
❧ **Offering of Sacrifice:**

❧ Lev 14:19 The priest shall offer the sin offering, to make atonement for him who is to be cleansed from his uncleanness....

History of the Priesthood



- ✧ Characteristic duties of the priests:
 - ✧ Mediation of Forgiveness of Sins:
 - ✧ Lev 5:5 When a man is guilty ... he shall confess the sin he has committed, 6 and he shall bring his guilt offering ... and the priest shall make atonement for him for his sin ... 10 and he shall be forgiven.



History of Priesthood



❧ The Priesthood of David

❧ **2 Sam. 5:6** And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off” — thinking, “David cannot come in here.” **7**
Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

History of Priesthood



❧ The Priesthood of David

❧ **2 Sam. 6:12** David went and brought up the ark of God ... to the city of David with rejoicing; **13** and when those who bore the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, *he sacrificed an ox and a fatling.* **14** And David danced before the LORD with all his might; and *David was girded with a linen ephod.* **18** And when David had finished offering the burnt offerings and the peace offerings, *he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts*

History of Priesthood



❧ The Priesthood of David

❧ Psa. 110:0 A Psalm of David.

1 The LORD says to my lord:
“Sit at my right hand, till I make
your enemies your
footstool.” ... 4 The LORD has
sworn and will not change his
mind, “You are a priest for ever
after the order of Melchizedek.”

❧ 2 Sam. 8:18 ... David’s sons
were priests.



History of Priesthood



❧ The Priesthood of David

❧ **Heb. 7:11** Now if perfection had been attainable through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need would there have been for another priest to arise after the order of Melchizedek?

Priesthood in the Prophets



❧ **Is. 56:3** Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely separate me from his people”; and let not the eunuch say, “Behold, I am a dry tree.” ⁴ For thus says the LORD: “To the eunuchs who keep my sabbaths, who choose the things that please me and hold fast my covenant, ⁵ I will give in my house and within my walls a monument and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name which shall not be cut off.

Priesthood in the Prophets



✧ **Is. 56:6** “And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to **minister** to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his **servants**, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant — ⁷ these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful **in my house** of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Priesthood in the Prophets



✧ **Is. 66:18** “For ... I am coming to gather all nations and tongues ...¹⁹ And from them I will send survivors to the nations ... to the coastlands afar off... and they shall declare my glory among the nations. ²⁰ And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the LORD... to my holy mountain Jerusalem ... just as the Israelites bring their cereal offering ... to the house of the LORD. ²¹ *And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.*

History of Priesthood



✧ **Jesus, Royal Priestly Son of David**

✧ **Matt. 1:1** The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ,
the son of David...

History of Priesthood



✧ Jesus, Royal Priestly Son of David

✧ **Matt 12:3** He said to them, “Have you not read what David did, when he was hungry, and those who were with him: **4** how he entered the house of God and ate the bread of the Presence, which it was not lawful for him to eat nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? **5** Or have you not read in the law how on the sabbath the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are guiltless?

History of Priesthood



❧ **Jesus, Royal Priestly Son of David**

❧ Ben XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, vol. 1, p. 108 “Rabbi Jacob Neusner comments: ‘He [Jesus] and his disciples may do on the Sabbath what they do because they stand in the place of the priests in the Temple ...’”

History of Priesthood



❧ The Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

- ❧ **Matt. 16:18** And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it. **19** I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*"
- ❧ **Matt. 18:18** Truly, I say to you, *whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.*

History of Priesthood



❧ The Apostles as Priestly Viceroys: Halakhic Authority

❧ “The power of binding and loosing was always claimed by the Pharisees.... Josephus says they ("B J." i, 5, § 2), "became the administrators of all public affairs so as to ... to loose and to bind." This does not mean that, as the learned men, they merely decided what, according to the Law, was forbidden or allowed, but that they possessed ... the power of tying or untying a thing by the spell of their divine authority...This power and authority ... received its ratification and final sanction from the celestial court of justice” – 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia

History of Priesthood



❧ The Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

- ❧ “In this sense Jesus, *when appointing his disciples to be his successors*, used the familiar formula (Matt. xvi. 19, xviii. 18). By these words he virtually invested them with the same authority as that which he found belonging to the scribes and Pharisees” — R. Kaufmann Kohler, 1906 Jewish Encyclopedia
- ❧ *But the Scribes and Pharisees had usurped this from the priesthood!!*
- ❧ 5Q13:7: “You appointed [Levi] to bind [and to loose]

History of Priesthood



❧ The Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

❧ **Deut. 17:8** “If any case arises requiring decision between one ... kind of legal right and another... any case ... which is too difficult for you, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God will choose, **9** and coming to the **Levitical priests**, and to the judge who is in office in those days, you shall consult them, and they shall declare to you the decision. ... you shall not turn aside from the verdict which they declare to you... **12** The man who acts presumptuously, by not obeying the **priest** ... that man shall die...

History of Priesthood



❧ The Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

❧ John 20:22 And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. 23 If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

❧ Lev. 5:5 When a man is guilty ... he shall confess the sin he has committed, 6 and he shall bring his guilt offering to the LORD ... 10 and the priest shall make atonement for him for the sin which he has committed, and he shall be forgiven.

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

✧ **Luke 22:19** And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body which is given for you. *Do this in remembrance of me.*"

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

✧ **Luke 22:19** And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, “This is my body which is given for you. *Do this in remembrance of me*” or “*do this as my memorial [offering]*” (Gk *eis tên emên anamnêsin*)

✧ *eis anamnêsin*, see Pss 37 & 69 LXX (Pss 38 & 70 MT, ET)

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostles as Priestly Viceroys

✧ **Luke 22:28:** “You are those who have continued with me in my trials; **29** and I covenant (*diatithêmi*) to you, as my Father covenanted (*diatithêmi*) to me, a kingdom, **30** that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostolic Succession:

- ✧ **Acts 14:23** And when they [the apostles] had *appointed presbyters* for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they believed.
- ✧ **Acts 16:4** As they went on their way through the cities, they delivered to them for observance *the decisions which had been reached by the apostles and presbyters* who were at Jerusalem.

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostolic Succession:

✧ 1 Pet. 5:1 *So I exhort the presbyters among you, as a fellow presbyter and a witness of the sufferings of Christ as well as a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed.* 2 Tend the flock of God that is your charge, not by constraint but willingly, not for shameful gain but eagerly, 3 not as domineering over those in your charge but being examples to the flock.

History of Priesthood



✧ Apostolic Succession:

✧ **Titus 1:5** This is why I left you in Crete, that you might amend what was defective, and *appoint presbyters in every town as I directed you...*

✧ Titus is the extension of Paul's apostolic authority, exercising his authority where and when he cannot be there personally ... ergo his successor ...

✧ **2 Tim. 2:2** "What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also..."

History of Priesthood



- ✠ Clement of Rome, *1 Corinthians* 42:4–5, 44:1–3 [A.D. 80]:
- ✠ “Through countryside and city [the apostles] preached, and they appointed their earliest converts, testing them by the Spirit, to be the bishops and deacons of future believers.... Our apostles knew through our Lord Jesus Christ that there would be strife for the office of bishop. For this reason, therefore, ... they appointed those who have already been mentioned and afterwards added the further provision that, if they should die, other approved men should succeed to their ministry ...”

History of Priesthood



- ✧ Ignatius of Antioch, Magnesians 6:
- ✧ “Be eager to do everything in godly harmony, the bishop presiding in the place of God and **the presbyters in the place of the council of the apostles** and the deacons, who are most dear to me, having been entrusted with the service of Jesus Christ...

History of Priesthood



- ❧ **Luke 22:28** “You are those who have continued with me in my trials; **29** and I covenant (*diatithemi*) to you, as my Father covenanted (*diatithemi*) to me, a kingdom, **30** that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom, and *sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel*.
- ❧ Bestowal of vice-royal authority by covenant
- ❧ First privilege is the participation/administration of the sacraments, a royal privilege.
- ❧ But secondly, *governance*!

History of Priesthood



- ❧ Where does the idea of *thrones over the twelve tribes of Israel* come from?
- ❧ Psalm 122, a Psalm of Ascent:
- ❧ **Psa. 122:3** Jerusalem, built as a city which is bound firmly together, **4** to which the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, as was decreed for Israel, *to give thanks* to the name of the LORD. **5** There thrones for judgment were set, *the thrones of the house of David*.
- ❧ These are the *kathedras*!

The Catholic Priest and the Bible



- ❧ You hold authority literally, historically traceable back to David!
- ❧ You are extensions of the viceroial Davidic authority of your bishop
- ❧ You share in the Melchizedekian priesthood of David
- ❧ You have been given a Davidic character on your soul by the sacrament of Holy Orders

JESUS *and the*
OLD TESTAMENT ROOTS
of the PRIESTHOOD



JOHN BERGSMA

THE WORD OF THE LORD



Reflections on the
SUNDAY MASS READINGS
for YEAR A

JOHN BERGSMA

Contacts



✧ www.JohnBergsma.com

✧ www.CatholicBibleTeacher.com

✧ jbergsma@franciscan.edu