

Commentary: 24th Sunday Year B

FIRST READING: Isaiah 50:5–9a

Today's 1st reading, considered the 3rd song of the suffering servant, comes again from 2nd Isaiah (chapters 40-55), what scholars commonly assume is written some 150 years later than 1st Isaiah, since the addresses now seem to be exiles in Babylon rather than inhabitants of Jerusalem.

⁵The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, I did not turn backward. ⁶I gave my back to those who struck me, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I did not hide my face from insult and spitting. ⁷The Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸he who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. ⁹It is the Lord GOD who helps me; who will declare me guilty? All of them will wear out like a garment; the moth will eat them up.

This reading from Isaiah relates to the 2nd part of the Gospel. Jesus saw Himself as this Servant of the Lord, who had full confidence in the Lord amidst great suffering and humiliation.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM: PSALM 116

R. I walk before the LORD in the land of the living.

¹I love the LORD, because he has heard my voice and my supplications. ²Because he inclined his ear to me, therefore I will call on him as long as I live. *R.*

³The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. ⁴Then I called on the name of the LORD: "O LORD, I pray, save my life!" *R.*

⁵Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; our God is merciful. ⁶The LORD protects the simple; when I was brought low, he saved me. *R.*

⁸For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

⁹I walk before the LORD in the land of the living. *R.*

SECOND READING: James 2:14–18

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? ¹⁷ So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.

Saint James does not place faith and works in opposition, but instead contrasts a living faith and a dead one... Works righteousness (the heresy of Pelagianism) was condemned by the Church at the Council of Ephesus in A.D. 431. One cannot “earn” or “work” their way into heaven. The gift of eternal life with the Father is freely given to all who will avail themselves of it. However, one must live the life of Christ if they expect to enter heaven. The corporal works of mercy are done, not because we are obliged to do them, but because we love Jesus so much that we want to do them. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Matthew 7:21). – St. Charles Borromeo Bible Study

GOSPEL: Mark 8:27–35

“This passage is the turning point in Mark’s gospel. Up until now the stories we have heard have all shown ever increasing wonder and amazement at Jesus’ personality, his goodness and his authority. But even his closest disciples do not seem to have seen what this implies. Then suddenly Peter comes to the realization that Jesus is the Messiah, the Anointed of God, for whom everyone was waiting. However, Peter still does not understand what this implies. Jesus is not a conquering political hero, who will simply wipe out all opposition by overwhelming force, and make every path smooth and gentle. Jesus begins to show his disciples that the road to fulfilment is through suffering.” – Wansbrough, H. (2012). *The Sunday Word: A Commentary on the Sunday Readings* (pp. 217–218). London; New York: Burns & Oates.

²⁷ Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, **“Who do people say that I am?”** ²⁸ And they answered him, “John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets.” ²⁹ He asked them, **“But who do you say that I am?”** Peter answered him, “You are the Messiah.” ³⁰ And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.

³¹ Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. ³² He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ³³ But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, **“Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.”**

³⁴ He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, **“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”**

“How hard and painful does this appear! The Lord has required that ‘whoever will come after him must deny himself.’ But what He commands is neither hard nor painful when He Himself helps us in such a way so that the very thing He requires may be accomplished. ... For whatever seems hard in what is enjoined, love makes easy” [Saint Augustine of Hippo (between A.D. 391-430), Sermons, 46,1].

“Jesus never sought to lure men to him by the offer of an easy way; he sought to challenge them, to waken the sleeping chivalry in their souls, by the offer of a way than which none could be higher and harder. He came not to make life easy but to make men great” (William Barclay).