

FIRST READING: Isaiah 49:1-6

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah:

Hear me, O islands, listen, O distant peoples. The LORD called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He made of me a sharp-edged sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arm. He made me a polished arrow, in his quiver he hid me. You are my servant, he said to me, Israel, through whom I show my glory. Though I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength, Yet my reward is with the LORD, my recompense is with my God. For now the LORD has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb, That Jacob may be brought back to him and Israel gathered to him; And I am made glorious in the sight of the LORD, and my God is now my strength! It is too little, he says, for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel; I will make you a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.

The word of the Lord.

RESPONSORIAL: Psalm 71:1-2, 3-4a, 5ab-6ab, 15 and 17

I will sing of your salvation.

In you, O LORD, I take refuge; let me never be put to shame. In your justice rescue me, and deliver me; incline your ear to me, and save me.

I will sing of your salvation.

Be my rock of refuge, a stronghold to give me safety, for you are my rock and my fortress. O my God, rescue me from the hand of the wicked.

I will sing of your salvation.

For you are my hope, O Lord; my trust, O God, from my youth. On you I depend from birth; from my mother's womb you are my strength.

I will sing of your salvation.

My mouth shall declare your justice, day by day your salvation. O God, you have taught me from my youth, and till the present I proclaim your wondrous deeds.

I will sing of your salvation.

GOSPEL: John 13:21-33, 36-38

+ A reading from the holy Gospel according to John:

Reclining at table with his disciples, Jesus was deeply troubled and testified, "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me." The disciples looked at one another, at a loss as to whom he meant. One of his disciples, the one whom Jesus loved, was reclining at Jesus' side. So Simon Peter nodded to him to find out whom he meant. He leaned back against Jesus' chest and said to him, "Master, who is it?" Jesus answered, "It is the one to whom I hand the morsel after I have dipped it." So he dipped the morsel and took it and handed it to Judas, son of Simon the Iscariot. After Judas took the morsel, Satan entered him. So Jesus said to him, "What you are going to do, do quickly." Now none of those reclining at table realized why he said this to him. Some thought that since Judas kept the money bag, Jesus had told him, "Buy what we need for the feast," or to give something to the poor. So Judas took the morsel and left at once. And it was night. When he had left, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and he will glorify him at once. My children, I will be with you only a little while longer. You will look for me, and as I told the Jews, 'Where I go you cannot come,' so now I say it to you." Simon Peter said to him, "Master, where are you going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going, you cannot follow me now, though you will follow later." Peter said to him, "Master, why can I not follow you now? I will lay down my life for you." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for me? Amen, amen, I say to you, the cock will not crow before you deny me three times."

The Gospel of the Lord.

Reflection for Tuesday of Holy Week

If God seeks Isaiah, or God's Anointed One, to gather Jacob, Israel and the world's nations around him, I have some observations and comments. Israel was the new name God gave to Jacob. Biblically, it's the same guy! However, there were two separate kingdoms of God's people. Israel was the northern kingdom with Samaria as its capitol. Judah was the southern kingdom with Jerusalem as its capitol. Both kingdoms and their dynasties were destroyed and their capitols left in ruins. Their citizens were strewn throughout the known world in Diaspora. I think that this is what Isaiah meant. The personal names were a metaphor for God's entire chosen people.

Sometimes the narrative can be vague and its language ambiguous and unclear. Who is the “him” around whom all these peoples with gather and praise? Is it Isaiah himself? He died in exile before Jerusalem was restored. Was it God’s Anointed One? We are more familiar with the Hebrew and Greek words, Messiah and Christ, respectively. If so, could Isaiah’s words have meant Jesus? From our point of view, yes. Have the people of Israel gathered around him? Have the nations of the world done so too? Some, but not all ... yet!

Who will bring this to be? Will it be the pope? Will it be you or me? It will be Jesus when he returns to complete the Kingdom of God. Jesus told us that no one knows when that will be, only God. Look at this another way. Who saves us? Jesus saves; not you or me and certainly no politician. Jesus is the only Messiah and savior. In a few days, we will celebrate the way Jesus saved us, through his suffering and death upon the cross. God died to save us. We keep this event close to us as it is central to our faith.

One can try to take the Kingdom of God by force. Many through history have tried. How many invading or defending armies have claimed God to be on their side? Holy wars are not just in the realm of Islam. The Church of Jesus is divided today by theology, polity, history and human arrogance. We even have problems of turf when we try to combine our three local parishes into one. Egos can get in our way. Human hubris demands to do its own will. The prayer of Jesus is different.

When we pray, “Thy Kingdom Come,” and, “Thy will be done,” do we really mean those words? Who’s Kingdom and will do we seek with these words we pray? Perhaps Isaiah’s prayer anticipated this too. He was always the first, in his prophecy, to hear the Word of God. He had to hear, accept, appropriate and make his own God’s Word before he could preach to others. It was God’s grace, not Isaiah’s good will that accomplished Isaiah’s transformation. His message was never to those who never heard it. It was to those who heard it and specifically heard it in faith.

I think of Isaiah’s prophetic word as being a process by which God works in and through people like you and me who have heard his prophecy. We are the only ones to give witness to the salvation that Jesus has won for us. In what we say and especially do that begins our journey to God and God’s Kingdom. God works through us in ways we may never know. Can we pray, “Father, into your hands I commend my spirit?”

Can we also commend the people who have not yet, by the grace of God, received God's gift of faith into God's loving hands? One prayer that may help to do that is, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." With that prayer can we include ourselves among those who need God's salvation and forgiveness? For it is from this perspective that we receive Isaiah's message and begin our journey to the Kingdom of God. Isaiah speaks to us first. We have heard him in faith.

The gospel of John showed Jesus, on a number of separate occasions, to experience emotions that we normally do not equate with the Son of God and our redeemer. He portrayed an enraged and violent Jesus who drove people out of the Temple Precincts with a whip and over turning tables as he did so. He depicted a deeply troubled and grieving Jesus weeping over his beloved friend Lazarus's death. Here, in today's gospel, Jesus felt deeply troubled again. What are we to make of this? If Jesus as God went through this, what hope have we? Are anger, fear, grief, anxiety and suffering going to be the fate of humanity forever?

This is a powerful observation and it can raise many profound questions for you and me. We believe, but we doubt too. There are so many problems we face personally and as the collective human race. We have little strength, and sometimes, absolutely no power to change any of them. We hardly have any means of changing ourselves and our behavior. Look how hard it is to lose five pounds. But in these feelings and questions we miss the point of Jesus. Jesus saves people through the forgiveness of sin. He transforms the people, not their situations.

Jesus is God's Word made flesh who dwells among us, through whom we have life, faith, forgiveness and the promise of eternal life. It is Jesus' life that can change us. Jesus went through all we go through, except sin. However, Jesus became sin as God by taking on our sins when he died. No one killed Jesus; neither group nor person. We didn't drive the nails into Jesus by our sins. He chose them to save us. Neither the Jews nor the Romans have responsibility for what Jesus did. The traitorous Judas and the cowardly Peter were not Jesus' killers. This is the radical message of Jesus' sacrifice; the Good News. Jesus died to save them all, sinners, and us, of whom I am foremost. Can we find faith to believe and trust? Lord, I believe! Help my unbelief. Salvation is a process that ends in the kingdom of God when Jesus returns.

There have been a few connections with lines in today's gospel I have noted with this reading of it. Why was Jesus troubled? He knew what was coming; he, like

we, feared suffering and death. I just received my second booster shot this morning (Monday). I feared the jab. I don't look forward to feeling like I'm coming down with something tomorrow. I can see the benefits for my health and for the collective movement to end COVID 19's scourge. Jesus knew who he was as God's Word, Son, Messiah and Savior. He told Judas to be quick in response to his anxiety.

Jesus made two accusations in the form of predictions at this last meal. He pointed out Judas as his betrayer and Peter who would betray Jesus by his denials. Of Judas, we will hear little more of his life, let alone death, in John's gospel. But Peter will have a prominent role, still. Has Jesus forgiven them before the fact? I take a compassionate view of Judas treachery. Without his betrayal, Jesus would never have died.

Judas was the means, whether he knew it or not, of the fulfillment of God's will and plan. John laid out God's plan with his prologue, which began his epic. Peter would become a founder of Christ's Church. Both of these men, in their weakness and sin, did God's will. Sin was the basis of Jesus' sacrifice. Our sin has brought us to faith and to salvation through forgiveness of our sins. Anthony DeMello, a Jesuit priest now dead, put the mystery this way, "Repentance reaches fullness when you are brought to gratitude for your sins."

Jesus also told Peter, and the other ten, "Where I am going, you cannot come." He also added, "Though you will follow later." On the surface, Jesus meant his death and later theirs. I say on the surface because there are many layers of meaning one can find in John's gospel. Jesus also faced the "Way of the Cross." Some of these guys, at least two from John's narrative did keep track of Jesus' trial, torture and death; Peter and the Beloved Disciple. There was also one who was, "known to the high priest." Was this yet another? We know of the women, family and friends who stood and witnessed the cross. The Beloved Disciple stood with them. Only John's gospel proclaimed this detail.

Jesus had a mission that preceded his death. He preached, taught and served. The Good News of repentance Jesus proclaimed. He healed and forgave those afflicted in weakness. He described the Kingdom of God as he taught in parables. The disciples, at this last meal, were not yet the Church. They would become the Church after the events of the cross, resurrection and ascension of Jesus that led to Pentecost, when all things fell into place, by faith given to them by the Holy Spirit. From that moment on, they would follow in Jesus steps to form the Church in Jesus' name. They needed the magnificent outpouring of love by the Holy Spirit for that. This is the definition of the power of God.

Jesus was about to die. Death was close to Jesus, but not yet for the disciples. Each of them did die. The scriptures do not tell us how many of them died. Judas has two versions that conflict telling how he died. Matthew told us that he hanged himself. Luke told us in Acts that he tripped, fell and burst his belly so his guts spilled out, so full of evil was he. As I said they conflict. James, the brother of Jesus, got beheaded by Herod's goons, as related in Acts. Steven was pelted with rocks until he died by blunt force, in the presence of Saul, who became Paul through eventual faith in Jesus. The rest is part of stories told and handed on to become Tradition with a capital "T" which for us Catholics rated as revelation like scripture.

Each of us will die too. We believe that we have died in Christ through our Baptism to rise to new life also in Christ. Most of us do not remember our baptism since it was as infants we received the sacrament. I do not remember the day. There are no photos or videos of it either. Cameras were banned in Catholic churches in the early 1950s and videos hadn't been invented yet. I do remember the baptisms of two of my siblings. I was old enough to remember. As a priest, I have baptized many. Raised as a Catholic Christian, I grew into the faith that I received at Baptism. My initiation into Christ and his new life has been, and is, an ongoing experience. Is it for you too? It will continue until Jesus calls our name to return to him in eternal life.

Yet, eternal life with Jesus is not the end. The promise of New Life will culminate in the Kingdom of God when Jesus returns at the end of the age. The dead shall rise with the living to witness Jesus in his glory to become Jesus' glory. The transformation of the world, its people, will be fulfilled then. New Life will become complete in God's eternal Kingdom.

However, Jesus said, "Now is the Son of Man Glorified." Sometimes John's words sound like double talk, ambiguous and confusing. What is Jesus glory? His resurrection, ascension to the father or his return? That's what we may think, but Jesus actual glory is his suffering and death. That was the reason Jesus was born. God became a human being to do what all human beings have done from the first of us; die. I'm reminded of the image of a soldier's glory. What is it? Death in battle. Soldiers who die give the ultimate sacrifice, their lives to enter glory. However, that's from the perspective of victory. Jesus died, victorious having destroyed sin and death forever. He was the victor having risen from death on Easter. Jesus was obedient to God's will and won. We believe and share in his glory now and in what is yet to come.

Isaiah's prophecy pointed to Jesus. Around Jesus we gather, believing and seeking him. Jesus is in our midst when we do so. We gather to remember what Jesus has won and begun; us and his Church. When we leave mass, Jesus sends us out into a waiting world that waits for healing, forgiveness, love and peace. These are the fruits of Jesus' cross, his glory that we all await; The Kingdom of God.

May the cross of Jesus remain our strength.

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