

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Scripture Readings

First Reading: Isaiah 53:10-11

The Lord was pleased to crush him in infirmity. If he gives his life as an offering for sin, he shall see his descendants in a long life, and the will of the Lord shall be accomplished through him. Because of his affliction he shall see the light in fullness of days; through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

Brothers and sisters: Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has similarly been tested in every way, yet without sin. So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." He replied, "What do you wish for me to do for you?" They answered him, "Grant that in your glory we may sit one at your right and the other at your left." Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking. Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" They said to him, "We can." Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give but is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John. Jesus summoned them and said to them, "You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones make their authority over them felt. But it shall not be so among you. Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. For the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

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Psalm 33

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Upright is the word of the Lord, and all his works are trustworthy. He loves justice and right; of the kindness of the Lord the earth is full.

See, the eyes of the Lord are upon those who fear him, upon those who hope for his kindness, to deliver them from death and preserve them in spite of famine.

Our soul waits for the Lord, who is our help and our shield. May your kindness, O Lord, be upon us who have put our hope in you.

Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.

Almighty ever-living God, grant that we may always conform our will to yours and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God, forever and ever. Amen.

Breaking Open the Word

We believe that the Word of God is living and effective. That means when we read or listen to Scripture, it is Jesus who speaks to us now, in the present moment of our lives. His Living Word gives us hope, purpose and direction in our lives. As we break open these readings for this Sunday, reflect on these questions:

What is Jesus saying to me personally that will give purpose and encouragement to me now?

Am I open to the way Jesus' words are living and effective in the people and world around me?

How will I respond to his message contained in these living words today?

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What Does It All Mean?

First Reading: Isaiah 53:10-11

These verses are also part of the conclusion of Good Friday's first reading. They come from the final "servant song" created by an unknown poet and inserted into the book of Isaiah. The song describes and interprets suffering endured by one person for the sake of others. This text's first verse suggests that God causes suffering, but the Christian refutes any such suggestion. The remaining verses portray a paradox: The one who gives his life as an offering for sin shall live long and fulfill God's will. The servant shall see light because of his affliction, and his suffering will justify many.

Second Reading: Hebrews 4:14-16

The letter to the Hebrews makes no claim to be Paul's work. By virtue of its vocabulary and its particular address to Jewish Christians, it has always been considered the work of someone other than Paul, who is known to have labored mightily to evangelize the Gentiles. It is written in perhaps the most fluent prose of all New Testament books. It is also the New Testament's most obviously supersessionist work, teaching that Jewish tradition has been superseded, that is, has been made obsolete, and has been replaced, by Christian revelation. Many passages seem to modern eyes quite anti-Jewish. Christ's priesthood and sacrifice constitute the main theme of this letter, occupying chapters 3-10. This text captures the gist of the letter's argument. Christ is altogether superior to the priests of the past. Unlike the high priests who have isolated themselves from the weaknesses and temptations of ordinary folks, Jesus has faced everything we face. He is then great high priest who has passed through the heavens. Let us therefore approach the divine throne in confidence. He who has become one of us offers mercy, favor, and help.

Gospel: Mark 10:35-45

After a very difficult teaching about riches, Jesus tells the twelve again about his passion. Without skipping a beat, James and John pose a question that is the focus of today's reading: "When you enter your glory, may we sit on either side of you?" Sometimes indignant over requests like this, here Jesus is more gentle. He asks: "Can you drink from my cup, can you be baptized in the same pain as I?" They insist that they can, and he affirms their self-confidence. But he adds that he cannot give what they ask. Meanwhile the other disciples grow angry with James and John. Jesus calls them all together and talks about authority. The Gentiles are accustomed to leaders who throw their weight around, but the disciples must be different. If you want to be great, you must serve all the rest. With the disciples, we learn here a little bit more about what we must do to follow Jesus. We cannot seek personal gain of any kind, despite Jesus' magnificent promises. We must act with a pure and simple motive. We must serve, perhaps even in the

manner of the legendary servant described in the first reading. We may even have to give of our lives for others.

The V.I.P. List

If you can't be the one in power, be close to the one in power. We can't always be the leader, but to have the leader's ear and be on his right and left is the same as sharing in the leader's mission. It is a sharing of power. James and John make a bold request of Jesus in the Gospel: they want to share his power. Perhaps they were still looking at Jesus as a sort of "military messiah," one who would violently liberate the people from the yoke of the Roman government. They wanted a major role so that when the battle started and after it was won, they would be high-ranking officials that people looked to, along with Jesus, and credited with victory.

We may look at our relationship with Jesus in this kind of contractual agreement. We want to be close to Jesus because of the benefits of the relationship. Jesus flips it all around on James and John, and they don't even realize it. Jesus tests them, asking if they really think they have what it takes to share in his mission—to drink from the cup that he drinks from—and they say they do. They don't know what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews knows. Jesus is the great high priest whose main concern is not that of a military leader, but rather of service and sacrifice. In fact, Jesus is the "suffering servant" that the prophet Isaiah speaks about in the first reading. He does free captives, but not from the earthly bondage of the Roman government. Jesus' mission is to free all people from the captivity of sin and death.

James and John can—and will—share in this mission, not as the people who have the power to liberate from death, but as the people that share the good news of the one (Jesus) that can. That is what it means for us to be close to the power of God. We put ourselves at the service of the Gospel, sharing what we've received and helping to free all those in the slavery of sin. Jesus invites us to be a part of this V.I.P. list (at his right and his left), but the benefits aren't merely about power—they are about eternity.

Lord, help me to be humble. When I begin to act for my own glory, remind me of my call to glorify you and not myself. With Jesus as my example, help me become the servant leader I was created to be. When I see others in need, fill me with compassion and move me to action. Amen.