

TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

Isaiah = Ī-ZAY-uh

Immediately, the tone is lofty and authoritative but with underlying tenderness and comfort.

Speak of the "sign" as something truly rare and unexpected!

Tarshish = TAHR-shish

Put = POOT

Lud = LUHD

Tubal = TOO-buhl

Javan = JAY-vuhn

You are not describing an ordinary event, but something marvelous and undreamed of: foreigners going to extraordinary lengths to return Jewish refugees to their homeland.

The return of scattered Israelites will be an offering of worship to God.

This news is remarkable. Announce it with joy and wonder.

LECTIONARY #123

READING I Isaiah 66:18–21

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

Thus says the LORD:

I know their **works** and their **thoughts**,
and I **come** to gather **nations** of **every language**;
they shall **come** and see my **glory**.

I will set a **sign** among them;
from **them** I will send **fugitives** to the **nations**:
to **Tarshish**, **Put** and **Lud**, **Mosoch**, **Tubal** and **Javan**,
to the **distant coastlands**
that have never **heard** of my **fame**, or **seen** my **glory**;
and they shall **proclaim** my **glory** among the **nations**.

They shall bring **all** your **brothers** and **sisters** from all the **nations**
as an **offering** to the **LORD**,
on **horses** and in **chariots**, in **carts**, upon **mules**
and **dromedaries**,
to **Jerusalem**, my **holy mountain**, says the **Lord**,
just as the **Israelites** bring their **offering**
to the **house** of the **LORD** in **clean vessels**.

Some of these I will take as **priests** and **Levites**, says the **LORD**.

READING I

The first reading, from the last chapter of Isaiah, presents a final prophecy depicting a grand transformation extended to all the nations. One startling revelation about the coming newness is the role given to all the nations. The nations (*goyim*) are peoples, Gentiles, who are not of the tribes and family of Israel. The Lord will gather Gentiles of every language, and "they will see my glory," the divine, weighty splendor and majesty made manifest. As the prophecy continues, the Lord affirms that up until now the nations have "not seen my glory." In the future,

however, God's glory will be proclaimed among them, reaching distant peoples who have never heard of God's fame, nor had any experience of God's glory.

God gives the nations the role of bringing back to Jerusalem "all your brothers and sisters" from the lands where they have been scattered. The vision is of a vast array of God's people, coming on every form of transport, suggesting a scene of women and men, and of the wealthy and the poor. Not only will the Gentiles bring back the dispersed people of Israel, but they will also present them as an offering

to the Lord. The Israelites themselves will bring the usual offering of grains, perhaps in the form of bread and cakes, while the foreign nations will bring the people of Israel themselves as an offering to God. An essential purpose of the gathering of Israel and the nations is thus for worship. The final verse, though ambiguous, seems to describe an extraordinary transformation. From the Gentile nations, God will make priests and Levites, giving them a cultic role ordinarily reserved for families of Israel.

For meditation and context:

This text is meant to rouse and encourage. Be sure your tone communicates that.

Imagine a grandparent speaking to a teenager who thinks his or her parents are too strict. Helps the teen see things from the other side.

This is an appeal to common sense. Speak with conviction.

Adopt a slower pace here to explain that time lends perspective.

Make eye contact and encourage, like a coach at halftime.

He's saying: "Walk the straight and narrow so that the joints already bruised will heal rather than break!" Again, you're trying to encourage.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 117:1, 2 (Mark 16:15)

R. Go out to all the world and tell the Good News.
or R. Alleluia.

Praise the LORD, all you nations;
glorify him, all you peoples!

For steadfast is his kindness toward us,
and the fidelity of the LORD endures
forever.

READING II Hebrews 12:5–7, 11–13

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Brothers and sisters,

You have forgotten the exhortation addressed to you as children:

"My son, do not disdain the discipline of the Lord

or lose heart when reproved by him;

for whom the Lord loves, he disciplines;

he scourges every son he acknowledges."

Endure your trials as "discipline";

God treats you as sons.

For what "son" is there whom his father does not discipline?

At the time,

all discipline seems a cause not for joy but for pain,

yet later it brings the peaceful fruit of righteousness

to those who are trained by it.

So strengthen your drooping hands and your weak knees.

Make straight paths for your feet,

that what is lame may not be disjointed but healed.

READING II The reading from Hebrews begins with a sharp reprimand to the sons (today we would include daughters as well), saying that they have forgotten the exhortation addressed to them as children. The exhortation combines a wisdom teaching from the Book of Proverbs (3:11) with Moses' instruction found in Deuteronomy (8:5), followed by the advice that believers should endure their trials as discipline. The word that connects the three segments of the exhortation is "discipline." The underlying Greek word is *paideia*, a term that refers to the rearing

and education of a child that includes instruction in every sphere: intellectual, religious, social, and physical. The *paideia* that aims to bring the child to maturity must include chastening and correcting, and sometimes punishment for misdeeds, as a parent would do to a beloved child.

The audience members of Hebrews are supposed to consider themselves as the adult children of the Lord. In the midst of whatever suffering or trials they are undergoing, they are to look to the Lord as the parent who is disciplining them. The training that God employs is a strong verb, *gymnazo*,

suggesting the vigorous exercise that people perform in the gymnasium. Those being trained must strengthen their hands, knees, and feet, bringing the person to healing and wholeness. The Lord's discipline and training, though it may be painful in the present, is so that the mature person will exhibit the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

GOSPEL

While Jesus is making his way to Jerusalem, an unnamed person asks if only a few people can be saved. Though the question is framed broadly, seeming to ask about other