

THE PRESENTATION OF THE LORD

LECTIONARY #524

READING I Malachi 3:1-4

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Malachi

Thus says the Lord God:

Lo, I am **sending** my messenger
to **prepare** the way before me;

And **suddenly** there will **come** to the temple
the LORD whom you seek,

And the **messenger** of the covenant whom you **desire**.

Yes, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts.

But who will endure the day of his **coming**?

And who can stand when he **appears**?

For he is like the **refiner's** fire,
or like the **fuller's** lye.

He will sit refining **and** purifying silver,
and he will **purify** the sons of Levi,

Refining them like gold or like silver

that they may **offer** due sacrifice to the LORD.

Then the **sacrifice** of Judah and Jerusalem

will please the LORD,

as in the **days** of old, as in years gone by.

Malachi = MAL-uh-ki

Proclaim in an authoritative tone.

As you proclaim the Lord's coming, the
assembly must hear excitement in your voice.

Smile on this line.

Pause after each question for emphasis.

Read slowly and say clearly each word and
word ending.

Levi = LEE-vi

Smile.

READING I Malachi, one of the last of the Hebrew prophets, wrote during the Persian period, when the temple was rebuilt and worship resumed after the exile. The name Malachi means "my messenger," and may either be the personal name of the prophet or a designation of his role to be God's messenger. There is a future orientation to his prophecy, looking toward the day of the Lord when God will act as a powerful judge. Even as he looks toward the future, the

prophet is also urging righteous behavior in the present time.

The messenger that the Lord will send to prepare the way may be Malachi himself, Elijah, or another prophet or leader. The messenger's unknown identity has led to a history of varied interpretation, with the New Testament ultimately seeing John the Baptist as the long-awaited one preparing the way. Whatever his identity, in both the original context and later interpretations, he will act powerfully and decisively, like fire that refines ore and lye that whitens cloth.

In preparing the way of the Lord, he will be the messenger of the covenant, indicating that underlying his role is the ancient covenant, always to be renewed. Every act of purification, though sometimes harshly painful like fire and lye, is intended to restore the covenant relationship between God and Israel. In particular, the messenger will purify the priests, the sons of Levi. Not only must abuses in worship be corrected, but even more importantly, purification will entail reform of the conduct of priests and

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 24:7, 8, 9, 10 (8)

R. Who is this king of glory? It is the Lord!

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD, strong and mighty,
the LORD, mighty in battle.

Lift up, O gates, your lintels;
reach up, you ancient portals,
that the king of glory may come in!

Who is this king of glory?
The LORD of hosts; he is the king of glory.

READING II Hebrews 2:14–18

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

Since the children **share in blood and flesh**,

Jesus likewise shared **in** them,
that through **death** he might destroy the one
who has the power of **death**, that is, the **devil**,
and free those who through fear of death
had been subject to slavery **all** their **life**.

Surely he did **not** help **angels**

but rather the **descendants** of **Abraham**;
therefore, he had to become **like** his brothers and sisters
in **every way**,
that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God
to **expiate** the sins of the people.

Because he **himself** was **tested** through what he suffered,
he is able to help those who are being tested.

Use an informative tone as you proclaim.
Take your time and articulate your words and
word endings.

Keep your energy up.

Read in a deliberate tone.

people alike. Only then will their sacrifices
be pleasing to the Lord.

READING II Today's reading from
Hebrews presents Jesus
from two distinct yet interrelated perspec-
tives: he is fully human and he is a high
priest. He shares in "blood and flesh," a
common idiom for a human being. Jesus
thus shares in the limitations and capaci-
ties of other humans. Because angels do
not share in these experiences, Jesus did
not come for them, but for humanity, with

whom he is in solidarity. Even as he
endured death, as do all human persons,
Jesus had power over it and over the devil.
In some Jewish traditions, the devil was
believed to be in control of death and was
even thought to be the cause of bringing
death into the world (see, for example,
Wisdom 2:24).

Jesus' power over the devil and over
death itself frees his brothers and sisters
from the fear of physical death at the end
of life. This is so because Jesus is the
source of life beyond death. From another

angle, existence outside the faith commu-
nity and alienation from God because of sin
is tantamount to being dead. Jesus also
frees his brothers and sisters from such a
moral death.

Jesus' role as high priest flows from
his humanity. He must be one of the human
community to serve as their high priest. In
addition to his being one with humanity,
Jesus is also a part of the Jewish commu-
nity, from whom the high priest must
come. Not every high priest was worthy or
righteous, as was seen in today's reading