

TWENTY-NINTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIOINARY #146

READING I Isaiah 53:10-11

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

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.

Isaiah = 1-ZAY-uh

Do not say the beginning lines too harshly, even though they convey a violent image. There is a lot going on in this short reading, and it is best understood in the context of the other readings for today. He endures so others can be justified.

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22 (22)

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

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.

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.

READING I

Suffering, as a mystery, points beyond itself to a deeper meaning, to an alternate, more vibrant reality. With its uneven and unpredictable distribution, suffering generates sentiments of anguish. As such, suffering can beget suffering, perpetuate and expand itself into all dimensions of life—physical, social, psychological, spiritual. In this way, suffering can take on a life of its own. Still, attaining life's greatest goods tends to call for suffering. Obtaining success often calls for hardship. Securing justice tends to involve equitable injury. And bringing forth

new life means birth pangs. The mystery and deep truths that lie at the heart of suffering are topics of contemplation raised by this Sunday's readings.

In the first reading, which is part of the so-called Suffering Servant Song (Isaiah 52:13—53:12), the servant incurs great suffering as an expression of the Lord's will. Crushed in infirmity, the servant's life is given as an offering for sin. That the Lord would bring about such a state of affairs reminds us that suffering is not beyond the purview of God's providence, and in fact may be a constitutive part of it at times.

Still, the servant's anguish and affliction do not simply bring about his end. Darkness and hopelessness are not where his story concludes. Rather, his suffering proves vicarious. It brings life for him and his descendants. Many are justified on his account; their guilt is borne by him through what he suffers. In this way we see that suffering rectifies infractions and ushers in new horizons. Thus, the first reading highlights how suffering can have various meanings and serve a variety of functions in our lives and in the broader scope of salvation history.

READING II Hebrews 4:14-16

A reading from the Letter to the Hebrews

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.

Take the negatives out of this section ("do have . . . who is able") to help you comprehend what is being said. With renewed understanding, return to the lectionary text as written. Use the "confidence" that the author speaks of.

Zebdee = ZEB-uh-dee

Names need to be stated boldly so we know who the characters are. When pronouns occur, the assembly can readily recall to whom they are referring.

Use an upward inflection after "drink" and pause.

They have enthusiasm.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

GOSPEL Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebdee, 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 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."

in heavenly glory.

obtain heavenly glory. Now, because he suffered and endured the human condition and elevated it to the heavens, we can be confident as we approach God in and through him. His suffering offers us a share

GOSPEL

Like students testing a teacher's authority, James and John come to Jesus with a completely open-ended demand: "we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." The request is laughable. No reasonable teacher would respond with an unclarified affirmative.

READING II

When Hebrews reflects on the glory obtained by Jesus as the risen Son of God in this Sunday's second reading, it aims to help its audience connect with the unfathomable "throne of glory" that Christ has attained in rising from the dead. Recognizing and celebrating Jesus as a "great high priest who has passed through the heavens" highlights the means by which Jesus' high priesthood has bearing on his followers and the human community in general. Put simply, Jesus' glory is accessible and meaningful to us because he can "sympathize with our

weaknesses" and he knows what it means to be tested. As the glorified, sinless high priest, Jesus provides us with access to heaven. Through his experience of human frailty, he serves as our conduit to heavenly glory. As the one who suffered the common human experience of weakness and endured the human condition, Jesus came to know the anguish of human limitation. But he also took this condition up into heaven, becoming a heavenly intercessor who grasps the fullness of the human experience. Thus, he made enduring human frailty the means by which we too might

Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink, and with the baptism 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."]

[Shorter: Mark 10:42-45 (see brackets)]

Put a slight comma pause after "great among you" and again after "first among you."

Again, the names are important. You don't want the assembly to think that the ten are indignant with Jesus for his response, but indignant at those who posed the question.

Naturally, Jesus asks them to articulate their request. And they come out with it—they want Jesus to share with them the highest honor, the greatest glory in his kingdom. Interestingly, their request is not rebuked out of hand as self-ambition. Rather, Jesus invites them to consider what they would be willing to suffer for such an honor. Will they drink the cup he will drink, or be baptized with the baptism that he will face? That is, are they willing to accept suffering to join him in glory? They say they are, and Jesus affirms that they will. But, in a cosmic bait and switch, Jesus explains

that the honors they request are not his to give. They have been prepared for others, one person can make another do but in what one person can make another do or endure in order to make another free. Whether it is service, slavery, or death, in the mind of Christ greatness amounts to accepting any suffering for the sake of others. E.W.