

TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

LECTIONARY # 131

READING I Isaiah 50:5-9a

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah

The Lord GOD opens my ear that I may hear,
and I have not rebelled,
have not turned back.
I gave my back to those who beat me,
my cheeks to those who plucked my beard;
my face I did not shield
from buffets and spitting.

The Lord GOD is my help,

therefore I am not disgraced;
I have set my face like flint,
knowing that I shall not be put to shame.
He is near who upholds my right;
if anyone wishes to oppose me,
let us appear together.

Who disputes my right?

Let that man confront me.
See, the Lord GOD is my help,
who will prove me wrong?

Isaiah = I-ZAY-uh

The readiness to hear is attributed to God,
not our own volition.

buffets = BUF-fits = hitting

The Lord sustains us; "help" needs
emphasis.

Despite the humiliation, there is no shame.

God is our advocate. The speaker challenges
any that dispute his claim. Use an upward
inflection and leave the question hanging in
the air.

READING I

The book of Isaiah repeat-
edly refers to a servant
whose identity remains intentionally vague.
In four so-called Servant Songs (Isaiah 42:1-4
for 42:1-9), 49:1-6, 50:4-11, 52:13-53:12)
this servant is the primary agent. Today's
first reading is part of one of those songs.
In it we hear of the close relationship that
the Lord forges with the servant. God has
opened the servant's ears—a remarkable
grace that is to be celebrated! This lan-
guage of "opening" continues a message
from last week's Gospel in which Jesus
opened a deaf man's ears to hear by touch-

ing them. At the same time, Isaiah advances
God will support him if a case or a trial is
brought against him, the servant repeat-
edly taunts potential contenders, daring
them to confront him and his cause. In the
servant, then, we see that being loyal to
God may mean suffering. At the same time,
we also recognize in the servant that suf-
fering-hardened loyalty can beget courage
and boldness of the highest order.
With strong rhetoric similar
to that of the passage from
Isaiah, the reading from James poses
a series of demanding questions to its

READING II

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9 (9)

R. I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.

or

R. Alleluia.

I love the LORD because he has heard

my voice in supplication,

because he has inclined his ear to me

the day I called.

The cords of death encompassed me;

upon me;

I fell into distress and sorrow,

and I called upon the name of the LORD,

"O LORD, save my life!"

Gracious is the LORD and just;
yes, our God is merciful.
The LORD keeps the little ones;
I was brought low, and he saved me.
For he has freed my soul from death,
my eyes from tears, my feet
from stumbling.
I shall walk before the LORD
in the land of the living.

A reading from the Letter of Saint James

READING II James 2:14-18

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,
if someone says he has faith but does not have works?
Can that faith save him?
If a brother or sister has nothing to wear
and has no food for the day,
and one of you says to them,
"Go in peace, keep warm, and eat well,"
but you do not give them the necessities of the body,
what good is it?
So also faith of itself,
if it does not have works, is dead.

Indeed someone might say,
"You have faith and I have works,"
Demonstrate your faith to me without works,
and I will demonstrate my faith to you from my works.

The author puts the thesis statement first and then uses examples and arguments to demonstrate his point.

Let these final lines ring out. Belief in the propositions of faith is not enough; it must be embodied. At the end of every Mass, we are invited to go forth and share Christ with the world. Listen for the closing prayer this Sunday.

audience: What good is faith without works. However, for James, if someone claims to possess faith, the legitimacy of their claim could be tested. And, should questions about one's faith arise, should a disciple of Christ have to endure suffering and interrogation like Isaiah's servant, support for claiming to have faith in Christ is found, according to James, in actions that match that claim. By providing for the daily needs of those who would otherwise go without, Christ's disciples embody the faith they freely receive from God. We know also that through such works Christians make Christ present in the world. Thus, by engaging in acts of care rooted in faith, the deeds of Christians demonstrate their faith. This is James' point, and with it comes the unflappable confidence of Isaiah's servant—no claim against such a one can be sustained.

GOSPEL

Jesus' words in today's gospel test his disciples' commitment. To begin, he asks a question that assesses their listening skills and invites them to consider his importance in their lives. At first, they are able to hide behind the thoughts of others. A second question removes the protective barrier

GOSPEL Mark 8:27-35

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

Jesus and his disciples set out

for the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

Along the way he asked his disciples,

"Who do people say that I am?"

They said in reply,

"John the Baptist, others Elijah,

still others one of the prophets."

And he asked them,

"But who do you say that I am?"

Peter said to him in reply,

"You are the Christ."

Then he warned them not to tell anyone about him.

He began to teach them

that the Son of Man must suffer greatly

and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes,

and be killed, and rise after three days.

He spoke this openly.

Then Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.

At this he turned around and, looking at his disciples,

rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan.

You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do."

He summoned the crowd with his disciples and said to them,

"Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself,

take up his cross, and follow me.

For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it,

but whoever loses his life for my sake

and that of the gospel will save it."

out a correct answer from his disciples. He corrupted. So, as with Isaiah's servant and James' audience, Jesus highlights that his disciples can anticipate hardship and suffering because their actions must reflect their faith in him. But suffering-laden discipleship also entails an unparalleled promise: to lose one's life for the gospel means salvation. E.W.

and compels the disciples to weigh the implications of following Jesus. If Jesus is another prophet, they could be loyal from a distance and avoid potential suffering. But if Jesus is the Christ—God's anointed—then following him at a distance is not a real option since Jesus would be the supreme authority in the cosmos. Wherever they go, loyally following such a force would inevitably mean facing conflicts with would-be competing powers. To say that Jesus is the Christ is to state where one's fundamental loyalties will lie: with God or somewhere else. Therefore, Jesus does more than draw

Caesarea = sez-uh-REE-uh
or see-zuh-REE-uh
Philippi = fih-LIP-i
Read this question looking directly at the assembly so they can appropriate it to themselves. Give a slight pause for their internal voice to answer.
Elijah = ee-LI-juh
Repeat the direct gaze the second time Jesus asks, making it even more personal with the added "you."
The narrator voice reports the content of Jesus' teaching.
Increase your intensity as the narrator voice ends and the character dialogue begins again.
The cost of discipleship is such an important lesson that Jesus addresses the disciples and the crowd.
Use a strong voice for Jesus' instruction. Practice so that the inverse relationship is clear: save/lose and loses/save.