



Holy week – Monday 6 to Sunday 12 April 2020

Jesus: Servant and Saviour

During Holy Week, we come to the point where Jesus lives the paschal mystery at its most profound depth. In the selection of weekday Scriptures and the Good Friday liturgy, the Church presents a portrait of Jesus in which he is consistently depicted as Servant. We hear readings from what are called the Servant Songs from the second section of the Book of Isaiah (chapters 40–55). As we move through the week's readings, we discover how this portrayal evolves.

On **Monday**, as the week begins, we hear the first of four consecutive passages from the Servant Songs. In Isaiah 42:1, God introduces the servant: "Here is my servant whom I uphold, my chosen one with whom I am pleased, upon whom I have put my Spirit; he shall bring forth justice to the nations." As a mediator of justice, he will bring about God's right relationship with the nations. He will do this by caring for the weak and needy: "A bruised reed he shall not break" (Isa 42:3a).

In Tuesday's Text the servant speaks of his own personal struggles in Tuesday's text, even questioning if he had toiled in vain to do God's will (Isa 49:4). Then God speaks, affirming that these sufferings are redemptive; the servant not only will restore the tribes of Jacob, but also will be a light to the nations (Isa 49:6), bearing God's salvation to the ends of the earth.

On **Wednesday**, Isaiah depicts the servant as a disciple waiting upon the word of his Master. "Morning after morning [God] opens my ear that I may hear; I have not rebelled, have not turned back" (Isa 50:5). The servant's faith in God's protection remains strong: "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" (Isa 50:7). We hear echoes of Sunday's Passion account, which describes how Jesus was mistreated during his trial and afterwards: "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." Patient suffering characterizes both the Servant Song and the Passion.

The **fourth and final Servant Song**, is a most fitting text for **Good Friday**. "Through his suffering, my servant will justify many, and their guilt he shall bear. . . . He surrendered himself to death and was counted among the wicked; and he shall take away the sins of many, and win pardon for their offenses" (Isa 53:11b, 12b). This powerful poem prepares us to hear the Passion according to John.

In a way, this Fourth Servant Song also **serves as a prelude to Easter**: the paschal mystery, as lived out by Jesus, God's servant, brings the world its redemption through forgiveness of our sins. The servant has borne the weight of our misdeeds and brought us reconciliation with God

Each day of Holy Week ushers us more deeply into the way in which Jesus models servanthood: as a mediator of justice, a faithful light of hope, a true disciple of God, and a suffering Redeemer. Such selfless service can only lead to glory!

Article by Gregory Polan, OSB.