

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

First reading:

(Isaiah 49.3, 5-6)

Israel, Servant of the Lord

We are about to set out, in the Ordinary Sundays of Year A, on a journey through Matthew's account of Jesus' ministry. In the gospels of Mark, Matthew and Luke, the reader accompanies the disciples in learning only gradually who and what Jesus is.

In the arrangement of the lectionary, however, put before us by the Church, the gospel reading of this first Sunday is from John, showing clearly who Jesus is, this year 'the Chosen One of God'.

The first reading from Isaiah, written in the dark days of the Babylonian Exile, introduces a Servant of the Lord, formed in the womb to be the Lord's Servant and to bring light both to Israel and to the nations. Is this an individual whose mission is to bring Israel back to the Lord, or is it the nation of Israel, destined to bring the gentile nations to the Lord?

Despite the failure to recognize the Messiah, the faithful of Israel still bear witness 'to the ends of the earth' to God's promises. It is remarkable that already at this stage of revelation the universalist task given by God is seen to be to bring the whole world within the orbit of the salvation promised to Israel.

Question:

To what extent am I called to follow Christ as the Servant of the Lord?

Second reading:

(1 Corinthians 1.1-3)

The Beginning of First Corinthians

One-third of this great letter is read at the beginning of each of the three years of the cycle.

Paul greets them as the 'holy people of God', but - like the pilgrim Church today - they were far from uniformly holy. But they were chosen to be holy, so by that same divine choice given a designation to be holy.

Corinth was a turbulent city. It had been sacked by the Romans for rebellion. But it lay on the narrow neck of land between the Aegean and Adriatic Seas, and so was a vital resource for shipping between eastern and western Mediterranean. After 100 years it was rebuilt, and 100 years after that, when Paul was writing, it was again a boom town, with two harbours, an international games more famous than the Olympics and a large segment of Jewish population.

Paul spent 18 months evangelizing the city before being driven out by the Jews. However, he kept in close contact and wrote them several letters. It was not an easy relationship: the Corinthians were arrogant and quarrelsome. Paul does not hesitate to correct them. He calls them babies whom he can feed only on milk, which must have upset the city elders among them!

Question:

What would your reaction be if Paul called you a baby to be fed on milk?

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Gospel:

(John 1.29-34)

The Lamb of God

In contrast to the other gospels, where the reader observes the disciples discovering gradually who Jesus is, John gives us a week between the baptism and the marriage feast of Cana, during which Jesus is given increasingly significant titles by those who meet him: Rabbi, the Messiah, Son of God, King of Israel.

Perhaps the most significant of all are those given by the Baptist himself: Lamb of God and Chosen One of God. Lamb of God overarches the gospel, for it comes again at the Crucifixion. According to John, Jesus dies at the moment the paschal lambs were being slaughtered in the Temple, and John alone refers to Jesus the scriptural saying 'Not one bone of his will be broken' (John 19.36), originally part of the instructions for the sacrificing of the lamb at the Festival of Passover (Exodus 12.46). In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is represented standing 'as a Lamb that seemed to have been sacrificed'. It is, therefore, an image both of his suffering and of his triumph. It links up with the picture of Jesus as the Suffering Servant of the Lord who moves through suffering and humiliation to vindication and to the triumph of God.

Reflection :

Reflect on Jesus as the Lamb, standing as if sacrificed
