

# 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Year B

Thursday, August 29th, 2024 @ 11:19 am

*Where do we take an earthly way of thinking for granted, when we should perhaps allow God's perspective to challenge us?*

## First Reading: Isaiah 50:5-9

- Part of the third Servant Song in Isaiah, this passage has been interpreted as looking ahead to Jesus the suffering Messiah.
- The latter part of this reading utilises court room imagery. How does this imagery relate to the New Testament, and to our lives today?
- Isaiah repeats that the Lord is the one coming. This is met with confidence by Isaiah, but he enjoins fear on oppressors and evildoers. What does this passage say in light of evangelisation?

## Psalm: Psalm 114(116):1-6,8-9

- The verbs in this psalm are helpful: first, calling on the Lord. The Lord hears the one who cries out to him and acts to protect them.
- Secondly, walking in the presence of the Lord. You might like to recall other passages that speak of walking with the Lord, and how this refers to our way of life and its congruency with our beliefs.

## Second Reading: James 2:14-18

- Using this passage from James, as well as what you know from other parts of the Bible like Paul's letters and the gospels, write a one sentence definition for the word 'faith'. Does that definition look different from what you expected? Does it challenge you?
- James speaks powerfully about prayer, and the firm belief that God answers prayer and provides for what is needed; yet he is equally firm about the need to live out our faith in practical ways, meeting the needs of those around us. How do these two realities fit together?

## Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

- Satan is called elsewhere in Scripture the prince or 'god' of this world; here Jesus uses Satan to represent earthly, human ways of thinking that are at odds with God's perspective. Where do we take an earthly way of thinking for granted, when we should perhaps allow God's perspective to challenge us?
- The disciples give strange answers to Jesus' question; why would people think he was John the Baptist or Elijah? What might this reveal about how people were perceiving Jesus?
- Look ahead to the end of Mark's gospel and the reaction of the women who approach Jesus' empty tomb. Jesus had prophesied that he would rise on the third day, as we read here. Do you think they misunderstood? Do you think witnessing the crucifixion and the stark reality of his burial shook their faith? What can we learn from this for ourselves?

### Sapling:

We come, in Mark's gospel, to the pivotal moment: the moment on which the gospel turns, from the Galilean ministry to the lead up to the Passion.

Peter, often the spokesman for the disciples, answered Jesus' question, 'who do you say I am?' He answered simply: 'You are the Christ'. We might say, 'You are the Messiah.'

We mustn't miss the magnitude of that declaration from Peter. The Messiah was long expected. The Messiah was more than a prophet, more than a King. The Messiah was the hope of Israel, the culmination of God's promises to his longsuffering people.

Imagine Peter's horror, then, when Jesus immediately proceeded to detail exactly what his Messiahship would entail: his own suffering, rejection, death, and yes resurrection.

I'd like to imagine that Peter didn't register that last prophecy, he was perhaps so bewildered by the first few that he just had to act. A Messiah who would suffer

and die? What hope was there in that?

Had Israel waited hundreds of years, gone through so much, through exile and occupation and oppression, only for their promised salvation to be put to death?

Peter, ever the practical man, took Jesus aside, we're told, and had words with him. Whatever was said, Jesus' response should shock us. Let's look at it stage by stage:

First, Jesus looked around to see his disciples. Was he making sure they were watching and in earshot? Did Jesus want them to witness this?

Then, Jesus uttered that famous rebuke: "Get behind me, Satan!"

Poor Peter! How crushed he must have felt.

I wonder, though, if we would be any different? How often have I, have you, tried to form Jesus in an image that I find comfortable; so that he thinks and acts like I would, or would like him to?

Listen again to Jesus' explanation for rebuking Peter: "the way you think is not God's way but man's."

Do we think the way God thinks? Or are we under the thumb of the prince of this world?

A suffering, dying, rising Messiah is comfortable to us today; we've had 2000 years to get used to it. But the problem with that is we've been immunised against the shock. We need to be able to feel it again.

Because it's not just Jesus who has to go to the cross. Each of us who profess to follow him, need to carry our own as well.

We would do well to remember this, as well, to Jesus' first hearers the cross was not the religious symbol it is for us: it was simply an instrument of terrible

torture and death reserved for the worst traitors and criminals.

To willingly take one up meant to be deeply courageous, willing to endure anything.

We see that endurance in the lives of the saints: yes, those who lived lives so different from ours, but also more relatable people like St John Paul II who endured his declining health, or Carlo Acutis.

Endurance and courage isn't the prerogative of a select few, it's the calling on all of us. After all, as James taught us in the second reading today, our faith means nothing, indeed is dead, if it doesn't have a tangible impact on the way we live our lives.