

# *Gratitude Foundation*

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*“Were not ten cleansed? Where are the other nine?  
Has only this foreigner returned to give thanks to God?”*

(Lk. 17:15-17)

**The Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B**

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Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret  
Executive Director

[www.gratitudefoundation.us](http://www.gratitudefoundation.us)  
[frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us](mailto:frglenn@gratitudefoundation.us)

3713 County 416 20th Road  
Gladstone, MI 49837

*“In all things give thanks, it is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”*

(1 Thess: 5:18)

# Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

## Reading 1

### Isaiah 50:5-9a

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?

## Responsorial Psalm

### Psalm 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

**R. (9) I will walk before the Lord, in the land of the living.**

I love the LORD because he has heard  
my voice in supplication,  
because he has inclined his ear to me  
the day I called.

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

The cords of death encompassed me;  
the snares of the netherworld seized upon me;  
I fell into distress and sorrow,  
and I called upon the name of the LORD,  
"O LORD, save my life!"

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

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.

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

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

## Reading 2

### 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.

## Alleluia

### Galatians 6:14

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord  
through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

**R. Alleluia, alleluia.**

# Gospel

## Mark 8:27-35

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."

# Exegesis

## Isaiah 50:5-9a

Our first reading today is taken from *Deutero Isaiah* or *Second Isaiah*. This section of *Isaiah* which includes Chapters 40 through 55 was promulgated during the Babylonian Exile, more specifically during the final years of their captivity. Our pericope is the third of four *Suffering Servant Songs* in *Isaiah*. The focus of this third poem is the fact that suffering unites the servant with all of Israel. Israel is suffering in exile, and it is their own infidelity that is to blame.

Chapter 50 is titled *Salvation Only through the Lord's Servant*. Versus 1-4 set the stage. There is much imagery in Scripture of Yahweh who seeks to espouse His people, Israel. Chapter 50 begins: "Thus says the Lord: Where is the bill of divorce with which I dismissed your mother?" (Isa 50:1a). The rhetorical question reminds the Israelites that there is no bill of divorce. Even though the people have been unfaithful Yahweh has not abandoned them, He has not divorced them. They are also reminded of the fact that "It was for your sins you were sold." (Isa 50:1b).

There are many interpretations of who the suffering servant is in *Isaiah*. At times it appears that it is Israel itself suffering in exile. Some speculate that it is the Prophet Isaiah or one of his disciples. The distinctiveness of the four servant songs allows us to move the collective interpretation to an individual servant of supreme holiness, greater than any single Israelite of the past. In his exegesis H. Hagermann has shown that pre-Christian Judaism gave a messianic interpretation to the servant songs. Later, Jesus identified Himself as the Servant. As Paul acts in Persona Christi, he identifies himself as the servant (Acts 13:47; Gal 1:15; Rom 15:24).<sup>1</sup>

*I have set my face like flint* (Isa 50:7). There is a singularity and intensity of focus displayed by the servant. This is a common image in prophetic literature: e.g. Isa 48:4; Jer 1:8, 18; Ezek 3:8-9. Luke uses this verbiage to describe the resoluteness of Jesus as He turns toward Jerusalem and the Cross. "When the days for His being taken up were fulfilled, he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem." (Lk 9:15). An alternative translation is, "His face was set like flint on Jerusalem." In any event, it describes a powerful force to give one's life for the salvation of others. It is the power of infinite self-giving love.

## Psalm 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

Psalm 116 is titled *Thanksgiving to God Who Saves from Death*. It is a psalm that priests, deacons and religious have prayed often as it appears in the *Liturgy of the Hours* on Friday Evening Prayer in Week II of the Psalter.

The psalmist begins by calling out to the Lord, trusting that God is listening. There is a sense of desperation in the author's voice, e.g., *I was caught by the cords of death*. Verses 1-4 are a distress call to Yahweh. Verses 5-9 speak of Yahweh's response, i.e., deliverance from death.

The psalmist is rejoicing because Yahweh has "freed my soul from death." (v. 8). The Hebrew word for *soul* is *nepes*. The etymology or evolution of the word gives us insight into the Hebrew concept of *soul*. The foundation or evolution of the word is as follows: throat, neck, breath, living being, person, personality, identity, life. In verse 5 as the psalmist calls out "O Lord, save my life," the Hebrew word that we translate as *life* is also *nepes*. The creation story in Genesis gives us further insight into the meaning of *nepes*. "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being." (Gen 2:7). The Hebrew word that we translate as *being* is again *nepes*. As this word evolves through Sacred Scripture it is easy to see *nepes* clearly as the receptor of and participator in divine life. God is *being itself* and God breaths His life breath into man such that man becomes a living being (*nepes*). The soul is therefore the receptor of life and the seat of life. Although this life/Spirit is obviously enfolded in a biological life form, the reality of the life breath of God as its source sets it above and beyond physical/biological life and death.

## Exegesis (Continued)

The evolution of the Greek understanding of soul, i.e. *psyche*, which we will see in the Gospel for this weekend, integrates nicely with the Hebrew understanding of soul. Greek Philosophy developed a very similar understanding of soul as the center of one's being. They also recognized the soul as something distinguished from biological life. They too differentiated between flesh and spirit.

Salvation of the soul results in the connection or re-connection with its source, the life breath of God. Damnation results from separation of the soul from its source.

### James 2:14-18

Our passage from *James* encapsulates the main thesis of the letter. Faith is more than an ascent of the heart and the mind; it must take on a form. That form is the embodiment of self-giving love. James goes on to explain this in another way in verse 26 as he concludes Chapter 2: "For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead. Therefore, faith and works are inseparable. To judge by the current passage and by 1:3, 6; 2:1, 5; 5:15, James means by faith the acceptance of God's saving revelation. By "works" he means obedient implementation of God's will in every aspect of life.<sup>2</sup> Note that James is not opposing faith and works, but living faith and dead faith.<sup>3</sup>

### Mark 8:27-35

The setting of our passage today from the *Gospel of Mark* is the beginning of a journey for Jesus and His disciples into and through Gentile territory. The journey extends from Mark 8:27 through Mark 10:45. The journey is introduced (8:22-26) and concluded (10:46-52) by episodes in which Jesus bestows the gift of sight on two blind men. By following the journey narrative Mark's readers also come to see Jesus and His "way" more clearly.<sup>4</sup> The journey to Jerusalem and the Cross takes them to Caesarea Philippi, up the mountain of the Transfiguration, through Galilee, into Capernaum, into the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, then down into Jericho and finally to the triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. Perhaps the most significant place/event along the way is the entrance into Jericho. Jericho was the sin-city of the ancient world. There was a path that bypassed the city, a path that every good Jew was advised to take. Jesus enters the city. He literally goes down to the city as the topology would dictate. It is significant in that Jesus makes the journey deep into solidarity with our sinful human condition. From Jericho it is a very significant upward climb to Jerusalem and the Mount of Calvary. Jesus comes down the Mount of the Transfiguration all the way to the depth of Jericho before He ascends to Jerusalem.

For the disciples and for us the journey is a journey of discovery of who Jesus is. It is a journey of discovery of what it means to be the Christ, the Messiah. It is a journey of discovery of what it means to be a disciple, a follower of Christ. It is a journey of discovery of authentic self-giving love. This journey is the heart of Mark's Gospel and of all Sacred Scripture.

Peter begins this process of discovery as he correctly proclaims Jesus to be the Christ. To proclaim Jesus as the Christ was to reveal Him as the long-awaited Messiah. The word Messiah comes from the Hebrew word *Masiah*. The word Christ is a derivative of the Greek word *Christos*. Both *Masiah* and *Christos* mean "anointed one." It was a word that was not spoken openly as Palestine was occupied and under the rule of the Roman Empire. The Romans allowed Judaism to coexist because they did not see it a threat to their authority. At the time the overwhelming understanding of the promised Messiah was that of a great political leader in the lineage and the

## Exegesis (Continued)

image of the great King David. The arrival of such a political leader to Israel would not go un-checked by Roman authorities. On this journey Jesus begins to teach the apostles, the disciples and us what the true role of the Christ, the Messiah will be. Victory will come through surrender and death. Total love will be revealed from the Cross as God gives His only begotten Son. To follow Him means to surrender ourselves in total love.

One of the key words of our Gospel passage in the original Greek text is *psyche*, which is often translated both as *life* and as *soul* in our pericope. It is important for us in this exegesis to continue with the subsequent two verses of Mark's Gospel: "For what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul? For what may a person give as a recompense for his soul." (Mk 8:36-37). In verses 35-37 the word *psyche* appears four times. (For a detailed discussion on the word *psyche* see my exegesis above on *Psalm 116*). *Psyche* is sometimes translated into English as *life*. There are two words in Greek for *life*. One is *bios* which speaks of what we know as biological life. The other word is *zoe* which describes life in the Spirit. Neither of these words is used by the evangelist here. With the alternative words for *life* and in the eschatological nature of the discourse of Jesus *psyche* should be translated as *soul* in this Gospel passage. This is especially true in what Jesus is telling us needs to be saved. Perhaps the gift of our physical biological life as Jesus surrendered on the Cross could be translated as *life*. Some English versions translate what Jesus asks us to give up as *life* and what Jesus tells us we will save as *soul*. This is how I used to understand what Jesus is asking of us. Now I believe that *psyche* should be translated as *soul* in all of these verses. The intention of saving our soul itself is self-serving. We are asked to die to self and surrender our innermost being, our soul, to Jesus. It is in our total gift of self that we are saved by Jesus' total gift of self. The proper translation of *psyche* in this context is therefore *soul*. "May God have mercy on my immortal soul" to quote my grandmother.

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1. Brown, Fitzmyer, Murphy; The New Jerome Biblical Commentary; P.H.; N.J.; page 340.
  2. Ibid.; page 912.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Donahue, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark; L.P.; MN.; page 265.

## Reflection

This weekend's Gospel contains what seems like a rather curious line from Jesus as he is speaking to Peter. It is a quote from Jesus that I have used several times in my homilies over the past several years. Jesus rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind Me, Satan, you are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do." The question is, how is he supposed to think? After all, Peter is only human.

The setting is the famous question of Jesus as they were on the road to Caesarea Philippi, where Jesus asked, "Who do people say that I am?" Peter gets the answer right when he says, "You are the Christ, the Messiah." Peter gets the answer right, but his understanding of what the Messiah is, is obviously wrong. When Jesus explains about His upcoming Passion, Peter out of love and concern, tries to dissuade Him. The common human misconception of the time was that the long-awaited Messiah would be this great and powerful king who would restore Israel to power again and release them from Roman oppression. The people were keenly aware of the power of God in times past, when the people were set free from bondage in Egypt and later set free from the Exile in Babylon.

Now the power of God as revealed in Jesus will look much different. The power of God is self-giving love. It is a power that transcends this world and will change our world forever. The power of love will transform the cross, the predominant symbol of torture and evil and death into the universal symbol of love and goodness and life. The power of love will transform death into life and the cross becomes the new tree of life. It is out of this power of love that we were created in God's image and likeness. God created us out of love for the purpose of sharing His life with us.

It is through the Sacred Heart of Jesus pierced on the cross that this love flows unto the world. We must meet Jesus at the level of the heart to share in this life. When we die to ourselves and allow God to open our hearts to His love, then we allow God's life to fill our hearts. This is the indwelling presence, the abiding love that Jesus promised us at the Last Supper. When the presence of the Risen Lord is within us then we "put on the heart and mind of Christ" as St. Paul talked about often. Then the divine illumination that St. Augustine talked about will enlighten the eyes of our hearts. Then we become the Love that is within us. Then and only then do we begin to think and know as God thinks and knows. Not only is this possible but Jesus is expecting St. Peter and each of us to come to this state of being!

It all begins by asking God to open our hearts as the Prophet Isaiah does to begin our first reading today. To that end we pray: Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

In Christ Jesus,





## Personal Witness

As a part of parish youth ministry, we used to take an annual trip with the youth to an inner-city community meal program and volunteer for a couple of nights. We met many amazing volunteers serving the less fortunate. We were always moved by the energy and the joy that those volunteers invariably displayed. One man had a profound influence on me and others. For the sake of this witness, I will call him Bob.

Bob was a regular at the early morning daily Mass in the parish. In the absence of a youth server, he would serve the Mass. He was a well-groomed distinguished gentlemen in his early sixties. At Mass he was dressed in an expensive business suite. After Mass he would have to quickly head to work where he was President and CEO of one of the city's largest banks.

Almost every day Bob was the greeter at the front door of the community meal which opened at 5:30 p.m.. He was now dressed in a t-shirt, faded denim jeans, tennis shoes and a baseball cap. Bob seemed to know all the patrons by name and most often by friendly nickname. He always had a smile and a kind word for everyone. He joked with them freely and they returned his jabs. After the initial rush of people at the door he would bus tables and continue to direct people to open seats. Bob had an amazing energy that was contagious. All the other volunteers seemed to feed from his charisma. Bob had a gift to make new patrons feel at home instantly as he brought people together. He was the first to make all of us volunteers feel welcome and comfortable in our assigned tasks.

Bob was a man of incredible faith. He had lost his wife to ALS several years prior. Having no children, he made his parish community his family. In particular, the community meal project was his home five nights per week. The pastor confided in me that Bob was a substantial financial supporter of the program as well. The days that we were there Bob was the last person to leave after everyone else departed and cleanup was completed. He was always kind enough to stay and visit with the youth as they processed their experience. He openly shared his faith and his desire to live the Gospel. His love for Jesus was evident in everything that he said and did. Jesus was the reason that he was there. It was clear that he loved the Lord and the people that he worked with and the people that he served. He had no other reason for being there. He came to Mass every morning to be fed by the Lord and then he in turn had an insatiable desire to feed those around him. His energy and his joy were contagious and so was his love. Bob was living the Gospel that we will hear proclaimed this weekend.

*F. Glenn*