

Gratitude Foundation



*“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-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time—Year B

Fr. Glenn Joseph Theoret
Executive Director

www.gratitudefoundation.us
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-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Reading I

Isaiah 53:10-11

The LORD was pleased
to crush him in infirmity.

If he gives his life as an offering for sin,
he shall see his descendants in a long life,
and the will of the LORD shall be accomplished through him.

Because of his affliction
he shall see the light in fullness
of days;
through his suffering, my servant shall justify many,
and their guilt he shall bear.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

R. (22) **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Upright is the word of the LORD,
and all his works are trustworthy.

He loves justice and right;
of the kindness of the LORD the earth is full.

R. **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

See, the eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him,
upon those who hope for his kindness,
To deliver them from death
and preserve them in spite of famine.
R. **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Our soul waits for the LORD,
who is our help and our shield.
May your kindness, O LORD, be upon us
who have put our hope in you.
R. **Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you.**

Reading II

Hebrews 4:14-16

Brothers and sisters:

Since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens,
Jesus, the Son of God,

let us hold fast to our confession.

For we do not have a high priest
who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses,
but one who has similarly been tested in every way,
yet without sin.

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace
to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help.

Alleluia

Mark 10:45

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

The Son of Man came to serve
and to give his life as a ransom for many.

R. Alleluia, alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 10:35-45

James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Jesus and said to him,
"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."

He replied, "What do you wish me to do for you?"

They answered him, "Grant that in your glory
we may sit one at your right and the other at your left."

Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking.

Can you drink the cup that I drink
or be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?"

They said to him, "We can."

Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink, you will drink,
and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized;
but to sit at my right or at my left is not mine to give
but is for those for whom it has been prepared."

When the ten heard this, they became indignant at James and John.

Jesus summoned them and said to them,

"You know that those who are recognized as rulers over the Gentiles
lord it over them,

and their great ones make their authority over them felt.

But it shall not be so among you.

Rather, whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant;
whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all.

For the Son of Man did not come to be served

but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."

Exegesis

Isaiah 53:10-11

Our short pericope is part of the fourth of four *Suffering Servant Songs* found in *Deutero-Isaiah*. Scholars comment that all four of the songs form the same dirge when sung in the original Hebrew language. Our short passage is near the end of the last *Suffering Servant Song* which comprises Chapters 52:13 through 53:13. The NAB entitles this section *Suffering and Triumph of the Servant of the Lord*.

The Prophet portrays the Servant as being one in solidarity with the people yet distinguished from them in innocence and holiness and in total service to God. The Servant is both one with the people and one with God. While numerous exegetes theorize who the Prophet intended the servant to be, Jesus reveals Himself to us as the Suffering Servant.

The Lord was pleased... The Suffering Servant, the Messiah, is a part of God's plan to save humanity. God knew from the beginning of time that He would send His Son into solidarity with humanity to save us. This is God's will.

He gives his life as an offering for sin. The Servant willingly surrenders His life for us. The word that we translate as *offering* is *asham* in the original Hebrew. It is used to describe a particular kind of sacrifice, i.e., one that is intended as compensation for that which is due because of guilt. This *reparation offering* is described in detail in Leviticus 5:14-26. "The wrongdoer shall bring to the Lord as reparation an unblemished lamb..." (Lev 5:15).

Through his suffering, my servant shall justify many and their guilt he shall bear. The verb that we translate as *justify*, *zeda* in Hebrew, is sometimes translated *to make righteous*. It means to be acquitted or to be declared innocent. The Servant accomplishes this task by bearing the guilt or bearing their iniquity. It is more than a simple legal action; the Servant takes away their iniquity by assuming it Himself. The one who did not owe the debt is paying it off. The Servant is paying a ransom that the slave owed but did not have the ability to pay.

Psalm 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22

Psalm 33 is entitled *Praise of God's Power and Providence*. It consists of 22 verses. It is full of rejoicing and of thanksgiving. The song praises God for His mighty power as creator of all. It portrays God as an all-seeing God who looks down upon us from His heavenly vantage point. It recognizes the insignificance of human life vis-à-vis God.

The eyes of the LORD are upon those who fear him. The Hebrew understanding of *fear* as a human response to God is more of a sense of awe and reverence as opposed to craven fear. It is a proper understanding of creatureliness in relation to creator. It is an understanding of our total dependence on God.

The psalm celebrates the mercy and kindness of God for those who hope and trust in Him. It is God alone who must be the object of human trust. God alone is Savior.

Exegesis (Continued)

Hebrews 4:14-16

Our selected passage concludes Chapter 4 of *Hebrews*. Chapter 4 begins with a section entitled *The Sabbath Rest* which describes eternal life as an entering into Sabbath Rest with God. This is the promise of God and the longing of and should be the goal of every human soul.

Our pericope follows *The Sabbath Rest* and is entitled *Jesus, Compassionate High Priest*. Our passage acknowledges that Jesus was already there and now has chosen to come down into our world in solidarity with us. He who is without sin chooses to enter into our sinful, fallen human nature. St. Anselm once said, “that which is not assumed is not redeemed.”

This theme reinforces the message found earlier in *Hebrews*: “Surely, He did not help angels but rather the descendants of Abraham; therefore, He had to become like His brothers in every way, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest before God to expiate the sins of the people. Because He Himself was tested through what He suffered, He is able to help those who are being tested. (Hb 2:16-18).

So let us confidently approach the throne of grace to receive mercy and to find grace for timely help. The throne of God throughout the OT is typically viewed as a place of judgment and rightfully so. In light of the Great High Priest, because of who He is and what He did for us, we can now approach that throne with confidence. The throne of God is the throne of grace and mercy, of forgiveness and love. Mercy triumphs over judgement.

Mark 10:35-45

The setting of our Gospel passage today finds Jesus and His disciples on the journey to Jerusalem where Jesus will face His Passion. Verse 32 begins *they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem*. They are nearing Jerusalem and Jesus has just shared with His disciples for the third time that He was going to Jerusalem to die and to rise on the third day. A lot has transpired, and a lot has been revealed on this journey. After the first prediction of His Passion, Peter, James and John went up the mountain with Jesus and experienced the Transfiguration. Now as they near Jerusalem they are about to descend further down into Jericho, the sin city of the ancient world. The journey down into Jericho is deeply symbolic of the descent of Jesus into solidarity with our sinful condition, into abasement with us. In Jericho they will encounter the blind Bartimaeus, and Jesus will restore his sight.

Now the blindness of the apostles is revealed. They still cannot see that the path to glory and greatness begins with suffering and death. When James and John ask to be at the right and left of Jesus, perhaps they still had in their minds the vision of Moses and Elijah at the side of Jesus on the mountain. But now, they still cannot see the road ahead. They cannot see that the road ahead of them descends before it ascends.

Recall that shortly before this incident the apostles were all arguing about who among them was the greatest. Now Jesus teaches them that the greatest among them must be the servant of all. What James and John ask reveals the deepest longing of the soul, to be at one with God and to experience our primordial greatness as God’s chosen beloved children.

Exegesis (Continued)

Mark 10:35-45

James and John along with Simon and Andrew were the first disciples whom Jesus called to follow Him. (See Mk 1:19-20). They are still learning what it means to follow Him. Now they learn that they must drink the cup of suffering that He will drink and be baptized into His death. The path is one of self-giving love.

Whoever wishes to be great among you will be your servant; whoever wishes to be first among you will be the slave of all. It is noteworthy that Jesus is portraying a downward trajectory here. The word that we translate as *servant* is *diakonos* which the Church adopted to refer to a deacon, i.e. one who serves. In its original usage it typically referred to as one who waits on tables. The Greek word for *slave* is *doulos*. The phrase “slave of all” is deliberately paradoxical. A slave (*doulos*) usually belongs to one owner and does the bidding of that one owner. By recommending that His followers become the “slave of all” Jesus underlines His ideal of universal service toward others.¹

The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve. Perhaps the most striking image of this promise is the scene of Jesus at the Last Supper putting a towel around His waist and getting on His knees and washing the feet of His disciples. This was the lowliest task of the servant or slave. Jesus, the Great High Priest, came to serve.

To give His life. The word that we translate as *life* is *psyche* in the original Greek. This word is most often translated as *soul*. However, in this particular instance it is more appropriately translated as *life*. There are already two distinct words for life in Greek, one that describes biological life, *bios*, and life in the Spirit, *zoe*. The Semitic idea of the totality of life, i.e. body, mind and spirit, is better captured by the Greek word *psyche*.

As a ransom. The word that is translated as *ransom* is *lytron* in the original Greek. It connotes the price of paying a price for releasing a captive. It was often used in connection with the release of a slave by someone, or the slave himself, paying the price to be set free from the bondage of slavery. The related Greek word *apolytrosis* appears frequently in the NT epistles (see Rom 3:24; 8:23; Eoh 1:7, 14; 4:30; Heb 9:15; 11:35) as one way of describing the effects of Jesus’ death and resurrection.²

For many. The Greek phrase *anti pollon* (*for many*) echoes the Suffering Servant passage in our first reading today from Isaiah 53:11 *through his suffering, my servant shall justify many, and their guilt he shall bear.* It can also carry the sense of “all.”

1. Donahue, Harrington; Sacra Pagina Series, The Gospel of Mark; L.P.; Collegeville, MN; page 313.

2. Ibid.

Refection

The question that the rich man asked in last weekend's Gospel, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" is still echoing through the readings for this weekend. James and John have their vision of sitting by the side of Jesus and in fact they ask for special seating, but the question is how do they get there? Jesus informs them and us that the only way is to follow a path of self-giving love.

The parting words of Jesus to the rich man were, "Follow Me." To follow Jesus, to put on the heart and mind of Christ, means to pick up our cross and walk in His footsteps. Those footsteps lead up the hill of Calvary. The one who knelt down and washed the feet of the disciples would lead them out into the garden of Gethsemani, through the Passion, into the tomb, and then, and only then, to the light of the Resurrection. The path to eternal life is one of absolute gift of self. We must die with Him in order to rise with Him.

Hopefully none of us will have to face martyrdom. The path of self-giving love for us may consist in smaller less dramatic acts of love. Cardinal Bernadine used to always say that the Christian life can be summed up in little acts of kindness. Mother Theresa of Calcutta used to say that we are not called to do great things, but we are called to do little things with great love. On Christmas Eve or at the Easter Vigil when everyone in the congregation is holding one little candle in an otherwise darkened church, I am always amazed by the amount of light that illumines the church. Imagine if everyone would light one candle with simple acts of kindness and love, how we could brighten our otherwise darkened world.

In today's Gospel it seems that James and John still have it wrong. Only after the experience of the Passion of Jesus, only after the Resurrection, empowered with the Spirit of Pentecost, do they begin to really understand what it means to follow Jesus. They too will learn the way of self-giving love and their lives will be crowned with martyrdom.

We have a God who totally gives Himself to us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Remember the response of Jesus to the rich man, "Go and sell all that you have, and then come and follow me." Only by totally giving ourselves to God will we be able to enter into communion with Him. God only asks for two things from us, all of our lives and all of our love! And don't forget the question, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" The answer is love. And so, we pray... Come Holy Spirit fill the hearts of us Your faithful and enkindle in us the fire of Your love. Amen.

Yours in Jesus and Mother Mary,



Personal Witness

I was blessed to be raised in a very traditional and loving family with five siblings. Mom was a stay-at-home mother, and my father was a hard-working provider and very traditional disciplinarian. As children we all had our household chores. As I grew older my responsibilities were more and more consumed with working on the farm. We lived in a merit-based system with consequences for actions and inactions. We were rewarded for listening, following orders and meeting expectations. We were consequently scolded and justly punished for our failures.

School proved to be very similar to home life for us. There too we found a system very much merit based. We received these things called report cards every quarter which our parents took great interest in. “A”s were the expectation for us and nothing less was acceptable. Nothing less than exemplary conduct was also the expectation.

From an early age I seemed to have had a deep desire to be the best at whatever I did. My father had a saying that I heard hundreds of times, “If you are going to do something, you might as well do it right.” This desire to be the best drove me to work hard at whatever I did. This drive resulted in hours of study and hours of practice and training for the sports that I was involved in, especially football. My high school football coach inspired me even further to give 110%, to go above and beyond myself, to leave it all on the field.

The inner drive for greatness and perfection translated well into my business and accounting career, in the beginning. It soon led to a workaholic lifestyle and burnout, however. It seemed that my best could always get better. I could always work a little harder and longer. The inner drive became insatiable and soon dominated my entire life.

There was a point in time that I really hit bottom and found myself reaching for Jesus. I felt like Peter drowning in the storm at sea and reaching out my hand to Jesus. And He was there. As I felt His love and mercy as never before, a peace came over me. I still wanted to do things right and to be the best, but the insatiable inner storm had subsided in me. For the first time I could accept myself just as I was.

One day I was watching an interview with Mother Theresa of Calcutta. It was near the end of her life and she was frail and very weak. The commentator was recounting all of the great achievements and successes of her life and the amazing accomplishments of her religious order. He asked her how she felt about her great success. She sat there silent for the longest time and then she said, “Jesus never talked about success. He only talked about love and faithfulness, and I have always tried to love faithfully.”

I believe that there is an inner desire in the human psyche to be the best, to be the GOAT, greatest of all time. It is a foundational desire to discover our true selves. We are already the greatest of all time. We were created that way as God’s beloved children. We are already the greatest because we were created a little less than the angels. We are already the greatest because we are a product of God’s love, because we are chosen by God to share in His life, and He is the greatest, the almighty supreme being, and He chose to create us in His image and likeness. We are reaching for what we already have.

F. Glenn