

Notes for Next Sunday

Palm Sunday

The Point of this Week's Readings

Old Testament (Isiah 50:4-11). This is the third of four Suffering Servant Songs. The Servant (Jesus) is given a learned “tongue” and a listening “ear” characteristic of “those being taught/disciples.” The Servant is the disciple par excellence because he always listens to God (Deut. 6:4), and this gives him the ability to speak a Word that sustains the weary. Jesus invites all who are weary to come to him for rest (Mt.11:28). Every lackluster believer may listen confidently for his encouraging Word. Ears are on the outside of our heads and not on the inside. This physical makeup encourages us to listen to God and not to ourselves. And our God speaks! The OT refers to the Word of God coming to his peoples at least 394 times. (CC)

Epistle (Philippians 2:5-11). This reading is pivotal, providing a bridge from death to life while giving us both promise and reason for following where Christ leads. The poetic, even lyric, character of these verses is apparent. Many view them as an early Christian hymn, taken over and perhaps modified by Paul. If so, they nonetheless express his convictions. The passage treats Christ's humiliation (vv. 6–8) and exaltation (vv. 9–11). Paul presents the imperative to think with our minds as Christ thought with His. A soul regenerated in Christ's image (Titus 3:4-7) has the revelation of Christ through the Word. (TLSB)

Gospel (John 12:20-43). Verses 20-33 strike a mood of somber anticipation. Chronologically, the text occurs between the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet. The narrative is rapidly moving to the events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, so there is an ominous expectancy in this passage. In verses 34-36 the crowd is searched for understanding. They believed from Scripture that the Christ would be eternal. Sadly, for many that meant the Christ would set up an eternal kingdom on earth. It definitely did not make sense to them that the Christ would die. Verses 37-43 show that the faith of many on Palm Sunday was fickle. Although Jesus had done His miraculous signs in their presence, including the raising of Lazarus, they continued not to believe in Jesus. Some were also fearful of confessing their faith because the Pharisees might throw them out of the temple.

For more in-depth commentary on each reading, read the notes found after each text below.

OLD TESTAMENT – Isaiah 50:4-9a

⁴The Sovereign LORD has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. ⁵The Sovereign LORD has opened my ears, and I have not been rebellious; I have not drawn back. ⁶I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting. ⁷Because the Sovereign LORD helps me, I will not be disgraced. Therefore have I set my face like flint, and I know I will not be put to shame. ⁸He who vindicates me is near. Who then will bring charges against me? Let us face each other! Who is my accuser? Let him confront me! ⁹It is the Sovereign LORD who helps me. Who is he that will condemn me? They will all wear out like a garment; the moths will eat them up.

50:4 wakens my ear. While rebellious Israel turned a deaf ear to God, the Servant would “speak just as the Father taught” Him (Jn 8:27–29). Therefore, a word from Him sufficed to sustain the weary. (TLSB)

50:5 I have not drawn back. The Servant knows that there will be problems but keeps going just the same.

50:6 my back to those who beat me. The Servant is abused by others as Jesus was in His Passion. (TLSB)

50:6 pulled out my beard. This detail of Jesus' appearance, commonly depicted by artists, occurs only here. Pulling out of a beard showed contempt and disrespect for the person. (TLSB)

50:6 mocking and spitting. To show hatred (Job 30:10) or to insult or disgrace (Dt 25:9; Job 17:6; Mt 27:30). This treatment of the servant anticipates his ultimate suffering in 52:13–53:12. (CSB)

50:7 my face like flint. Jesus “set His face” when he resolutely set out for Jerusalem (Lk 9:51). (TLSB)

50:8 my accuser. This implies the question, “Who is a master over me? It is hard to imagine that anyone would even think of doing something like that.

50:9 wear out like a garment; the moths. The Servant's enemies will be as fragile and vulnerable as cloth, which even a tiny moth can destroy. (TLSB)

EPISTLE – Philippians 2:5-11

⁵ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

2:5 Your attitude ... the same as ... Christ. In spite of all that is unique and radically different about the person and work of Christ, Christians are to have his attitude of self-sacrificing humility and love for others. (CSB)

2:6 equality with God. Jesus, as the true Son of God, cannot be less than fully God. He is equal with His Father according to His divine nature. (TLSB)

2:6 something to be grasped. † Something to be forcibly retained—the glory Christ had with the Father before his incarnation. But he did not consider that high position to be something he could not give up. (CSB)

2:7 made himself nothing. Lit. “emptied himself.” He did this, not by giving up deity, but by laying aside his glory and submitting to the humiliation of becoming man. (CSB)

2:8 on a cross. Heightens Jesus' humiliation; he died as someone cursed. Crucifixion was the most degrading kind of execution that could be inflicted on a person. (CSB)

2:10 bow ... confess. All created beings must and will confess Jesus as Lord: The saints and angels in heaven, all human beings on earth, even the demons and the damned in hell. (PBC)

GOSPEL – John 12:20-43

²⁰ Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the Feast. ²¹ They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” ²² Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus. ²³ Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. ²⁴ I tell you the truth, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many

seeds. ²⁵ The man who loves his life will lose it, while the man who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. ²⁶ Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me. ²⁷ “Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. ²⁸ Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.” ²⁹ The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him. ³⁰ Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. ³¹ Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. ³⁴ The crowd spoke up, “We have heard from the Law that the Christ will remain forever, so how can you say, ‘The Son of Man must be lifted up’? Who is this ‘Son of Man’?” ³⁵ Then Jesus told them, “You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. ³⁶ Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light.” When he had finished speaking, Jesus left and hid himself from them.

12:20 Greeks. Greeks" meaning Gentiles. "Who were among those who customarily went up." They were among the God-fearing Gentiles who worshipped in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover. (Buls)

12:21 Philip. Perhaps because Philip had a Gk name and came from an area near the Decapolis. (TLSB)

12:21 to see For that moment, the request was symbolic. They represented the Gentile nations and the fulfillment of the messianic promise of a light for the nations (Isaiah 60:3). It reveals the desires of people impressed by God’s law and made aware of God’s Messiah. It is the spirit of Christians to this day who never stop searching the Scriptures to learn of Him. (PBC)

12:28 Father, glorify your name! His prayer was not for deliverance but for the Father to be glorified. The voice from heaven gave the answer. (CSB)

12:32 lifted up. The cross was the supreme exaltation of Jesus. (CSB)

12:35–36 the light. Light is closely identified with Jesus, as seen from the call to believe in the light. (CSB)

³⁷ Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. ³⁸ This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: “Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” ³⁹ For this reason they could not believe, because, as Isaiah says elsewhere: ⁴⁰ “He has blinded their eyes and deadened their hearts, so they can neither see with their eyes, nor understand with their hearts, nor turn—and I would heal them.” ⁴¹ Isaiah said this because he saw Jesus’ glory and spoke about him. ⁴² Yet at the same time many even among the leaders believed in him. But because of the Pharisees they would not confess their faith for fear they would be put out of the synagogue; ⁴³ for they loved praise from men more than praise from God.

12:37 they still would not believe. God’s ancient people should have responded when God sent his Messiah. They should have seen the significance of the signs he did. (CSB)