

Set His Face

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Third Sunday after Pentecost) is Luke 9:51-62. Here Jesus “sets his face” to go to Jerusalem not to show wrath or mercy to Jerusalem, but to face and overcome all temptations and opposition that would turn him aside from traveling to the cross.

There are good reasons to consider 9:51 *the* turning point of Luke’s gospel. Jesus’ death has become an explicit part of his messianic mission (9:22, 31), and now Jesus begins the journey toward his death in Jerusalem, “the place of the full manifestation of Jesus as the Christ.” The long journey to Jerusalem fulfills what Moses and Elijah discussed at the transfiguration (9:31): this *is* Jesus’ “*exodus*,” which he is about to fulfill in Jerusalem.

OT precedents offer further illumination on the significance of the fact that Jesus “set his face.” God made Ezekiel’s forehead as hard as flint so that the prophet could endure the hostility of rebellious Israel (Ezek 3:8–9).

Jesus the Suffering Servant says in Isaiah 50:5-7: “I have not rebelled; I have not drawn back. I gave my back to the smiters, my cheeks to the pluckers. *I did not hide my face* from mockings and spit. The Lord Yahweh will help me; therefore I will not be ashamed. *Therefore, I have set my face like flint*, and I know that I will not be put to shame.”

Jesus, the Servant, is resolutely determined to go to the cross, fully aware of the torture and humiliation involved. He trusts in eventual vindication by the Father (Is 50:8–9), and he knows that the cross is the only way to procure salvation for humanity (compare Is 50:8–9 with Rom 8:31–34).

On this journey, Jesus will pass through many towns and villages and encounter many different people. He has much to teach. As Jesus begins to journey to Jerusalem, he meets rejection in a village of Samaria. Hostility existed between Jews and Samaritans at the time of Jesus, and although the natural route for pilgrims from Galilee to Jerusalem was through Samaria, many travelers would bypass Samaria by going south on the eastern side of the Jordan. Jesus deliberately passes through Samaria in his journey to Jerusalem.

In three brief exchanges with would-be disciples, Jesus shows that the cost of discipleship is high. Obviously, were it up to us to achieve our place in the kingdom of God, we would never make it. Thankfully Jesus took no shortcuts in his mission to save us. Jesus invites us and by grace makes it possible for us to become members of His eternal communion.

Prayer: Dear Lord Jesus, thank you for your determined and perfect saving mission to provide us with a permanent home in heaven with you. Amen