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Sunday Mass Study Notes for 10-20-2024



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Introduction to the First Reading:

Isaiah 53 gives one of the clearest depictions in the Old Testament of Jesus as the suffering servant, as it predicts in devastating detail His rejection, humiliation, and death for our sin. Although the prophet Isaiah doesn't reveal the name of this suffering servant, later generations understood that only Jesus in His death fully corresponded to the one depicted here. This was confirmed by many New Testament writers as they quoted from Isaiah 53 in speaking of Christ. (1 Peter 2: 21-24 is a prime example.)

What Jesus suffered for our sins in order to redeem us is sobering. The 10 verses that precede the First Reading reveal the awful truth. He was despised and forsaken. Furthermore, He was smitten (struck), afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, and oppressed (Isaiah 53:3-7). Yet, "He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth" (v. 9). His death was truly the just dying for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

Jesus did not open His mouth in protest because He knew He was fulfilling the Father's will. Referring to His life, Jesus said, "No one has taken it away from me, but I lay it down on my own initiative (Gospel of St. John 10:18).

The next verses, which comprise the First Reading, may seem puzzling at first, for they teach us that the suffering Jesus endured was according to God's good pleasure. The word pleasure here does not mean happiness, but that all would take place according to the LORD's will. As you read the First Reading note the Father's purpose for the Son's suffering.

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> *Isaiah 53:10-11 NAS95 10 But the LORD was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities.*

Our iniquity (sin) separates us from God, but the LORD caused the iniquity of us all to fall on His Son (Is. 53:6). Jesus took our guilt and punishment, and by His suffering we are justified, that is, made right before God and restored to a right relationship with Him.

As we consider Christ's suffering and sacrifice on our behalf, let us seek to live out that sacrificial love for the benefit of others. One of the most important ways we can love others is to introduce them to Jesus and tell them of the One who suffered on their behalf.

The Second Reading speaks about another kind of suffering—the struggle against temptation. Jesus

faced it and was victorious. When we face temptation, we don't face it alone. We have someone who understands and helps.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

The Second Reading takes us to a group of verses set in a larger context that speaks of Jesus as our high priest. In the Old Testament sacrificial system, when someone sinned, he would bring an animal to the priest and the priest would sacrifice it (shed its blood) on the altar in the tabernacle/temple. Behind a heavy curtain was the Holy of Holies (or Holy Place) where God would appear in a pillar of cloud or fire. No one could go in there except the high priest, and he could go in only once a year on the Day of Atonement. On that day the high priest would make a sacrifice for himself (for he is a sinner, too) and for the sins of all the people and carry the blood inside the curtain and present it to God. The sacrifice had to be repeated year after year.

Hebrews Ch. 7 and 9 tell us that Jesus is a high priest, but one far superior to the human ones we read about in the Old Testament. And here's why. Jesus himself was both the high priest and the sacrifice for sin. His sacrifice was perfect and total, and God accepted it as final. There was no need for any further sacrifice. No more work needed to be done to procure our salvation. Jesus had done it all. He rested from His work, and now as we hear the Gospel and believe, we enter into that place of rest. We cannot work for our salvation. We can only, by faith enter into the salvation and rest Jesus has provided (See Hebrews 4:1-11).

Our First Reading along with all of Isaiah 53 depict the pain of rejection and suffering Jesus endured for our salvation. We don't have a high priest far removed from our pain and struggles, but One who has experienced in a body like ours the sufferings of this world. Consequently, He can sympathize with each of us in our weakness and suffering. This is true also of the temptations we face each day. He has faced them, too. Notice the comfort and encouragement found in our Second Reading.

Second Reading:

> *Hebrews 4:14-16 NAS95 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. 15 For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been*

> *tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. 16 Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

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In the following Gospel Reading, the subject again turns to suffering as Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and reveals disturbing details about his upcoming suffering and death.

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This week we return to the Gospel of Mark. While on a journey to Jerusalem, Jesus takes his 12 disciples aside and tells them of the suffering He will soon be facing. He will be delivered to the Jewish leaders who will condemn Him to death. Then He will be handed over to the Romans who will mock Him, spit on Him, scourge Him, and kill Him.

Knowing the culmination of Jesus' life was at hand and apparently believing He would soon set up His kingdom, James and John make a bold request. They ask to sit with Him in glory in places of honor at His right hand and His left. Jesus knew the path to glory was through the suffering of the cross, and that all who follow Him would likely suffer, too. Rejection, persecution, and even martyrdom awaited them. Did they know what they were asking for? Could they drink the cup of sorrow He would drink?

Jesus then reminds them that whoever wishes to be great among them doesn't do it by seeking a place of honor or authority. Earthly rulers seek honor, authority, and power and lord it over their subjects. But this is not the way of God. Notice in the Gospel Reading how someone can be great in God's kingdom.

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True godly leadership requires serving. In St. John's Gospel, the apostle John recounts how Jesus demonstrated servanthood by humbly washing the disciples' feet—a job reserved for the household servants. Jesus told His disciples, "*If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you*" (St. John 13:14-15).

Serving sometimes requires not just humility, but sacrifice and suffering. Jesus demonstrated His willingness to suffer by dying for our sins on the cross, the ultimate act of service. Are we willing to follow Jesus' example and serve one another, even if it results in suffering? Whoever wishes to be great among us must humbly serve. For even Jesus himself came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many (v. 45).

Reflection Questions

1. Read all of Isaiah 53 and contemplate all Jesus suffered on your behalf. How does this motivate you to serve Him more?

2. Jesus lived a life of sacrifice and service. Who is God calling you to serve today? Write down ways

you can do that. Be specific and be thankful for the opportunity to follow in Jesus' steps.

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What Jesus suffered for our sins in order to redeem us is sobering. The 10 verses that precede the First Reading reveal the awful truth. He was despised and forsaken. Furthermore, He was smitten (struck), afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastened, scourged, and oppressed (Isaiah 53:3-7). Yet, "He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth" (v.9). His death was truly the just dying for the unjust, that He might bring us to God (1 Peter 3:18).

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