

the Sunday Readings

*Hope &
Act
with
Creation*



24th Sunday Ordinary Time
3rd Sunday: Season of Creation

24th Sunday Ordinary Time

the 3rd Sunday of the Season of Creation

the cost discipleship

introduction ¹

We heard last Sunday the encouragement of the prophet to *'Be strong, do not fear'* by relying on God's faithful presence.² Today, we hear the call of God's Word coming in, *'the Cry of the Earth'* and *'the Cry of the Poor'*.³ We are to put our faith into action and to expect resistance and suffering; our share in the cross of Christ. Like Peter, we struggle to accept the costs of being Jesus' disciple. But any profession of faith in *'the Christ'* which doesn't include the costs of discipleship, is incomplete. We read the texts with both *'ecological eyes'*. Our gathering declares our belief in the identity of Jesus as, *'the Christ'*. We face the costs of following *his Way; the Way* of renouncing self; of taking up our crosses; of being prepared to live in a radically different way.

first reading: **Isaiah 50 : 5 – 9** ⁴

[the servant's humiliation and vindication]

*The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.(5)
I gave my back to those who struck me,
and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard;
I did not hide my face from insult and spitting.(6)
The Lord God helps me;
therefore I have not been disgraced;
therefore I have set my face like flint,
and I know that I shall not be put to shame;(7)
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me.(8)
It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?*

1 Cover Image: The Creation Mandala – Each of the symbols of the Mandala represents: The birth of the Universe; The birth of Galaxies; The birth of the Solar System; The birth of the Earth; The birth of Life; The birth of Earth community; The birth of Humans; The birth of the Ecological Age and the birth of our story – artwork by Fr. Vincent Busch, SSC.

2 *Is.35:4*

3 In the *Encyclical Laudato Si*, Pope Francis relates *'the cry of the Earth and the cry of the Poor'*. Literally, cry is a metaphor that can mean the feeling of pain and suffering, the experience of sadness and loss, calling out for relief and sympathy. The Earth and the Poor have equally endured tears of lament. The cry is not just an expression of pain, but also an appeal to take responsibility. We need to acknowledge the groaning of both our ecology and humanity. In the context of climate change, the global warming affects the whole world, but it specifically affects the poor more.

4 The biblical excerpts are drawn from the New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), published by Oxford University Press (1994).

*All of them will wear out like a garment;
the moth will eat them up.(9)*

Isaiah affirms that homecoming is possible and that exile can end. The ending is possible because Babylonian power is now nullified through the LORD's presence and work among us. The prophet had earlier given the example of Cyrus, who had the power to liberate the Israelites.⁵ Now Isaiah concentrates on, *'the Servant'*, who represents the same *power for life-giving* precisely where no newness or life seemed possible (vv.5-9).⁶ In a situation where Babylonian power holds sway, the prophet challenges the exiles to decide between subservience or homecoming.

The prophet picks up one of the key themes from last week: the LORD God's presence and works among us, are recognised in the opening of eyes and ears; the loosening of tongues, to proclaim God's prophetic Word. To nullify the empire's powerful hold on their imagination, what the people needed is an imaginative making of a new world that is more credible than the world of the empire. The choice before the Israelites is between the power of Babylon (based largely on military control and economic power) and the LORD (based largely on the liberated Word on the prophet's lips). The issue is for the people to accept the gift of God's power for life-giving which displaces and nullifies the failed power of Jerusalem. *'The Servant'* shares this power for life-giving because he has been willing to endure insults, beatings, abuse and judged by the nations as despised (v.3).

response: Psalm 116 : 1 – 6, 8 – 9

[thanksgiving for recovery from illness]

*I love the LORD, because he has heard
my voice and my supplications.(1)
Because he inclined his ear to me,
therefore I will call on him as long as I live.(2)
The snares of death encompassed me;
the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me;
I suffered distress and anguish.(3)
Then I called on the name of the LORD:
"O Lord I pray, save my life!"(4)
Gracious is the LORD, and righteous;
our God is merciful.(5)
The Lord protects the simple;
when I was brought low, he saved me.(6) . . .
For you have delivered my soul from death,*

⁵ Is.41:2

⁶ Today's reading is taken from the *3rd Servant Song*. In the verse just before today's passage begins, the Servant of the LORD declares, *"The LORD God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them."*

*my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.(8)
I walk before the Lord in the land of the living.(9)*

A thanksgiving to the LORD for bringing the power for life-giving to the faithful sufferer (vv.1-4).⁷ The speaker offers the perfect prayerful expression of the faith of both *the Servant* and of *Jesus*, expressing gratitude for God's mercy in saving the Servant in the past; and reaffirms the belief that she/he will walk again with God (v.9).⁸ The speaker acknowledges God's power to transform and dismisses alternative sources of empowerment. The psalm became part of *the Hallel*, or, *Hymn of Praise*,⁹ sung at the Passover meal. Jesus went to his death with the words of the psalmist on his lips.¹⁰ The speaker unashamedly voices praise to the LORD for God's liberating action.¹¹

second reading: James 2: 14 – 18

[faith without works is dead]

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you?(14) If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food,(15) and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that?(16) So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.(17) But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith.(18)

In developing the theme of, 'doing the truth', James asks his hearers/readers to imagine themselves in a situation in which they have inadequate clothes and food. Earlier, the writer makes the point that in the Christian community there mustn't be any discrimination based on status or wealth.¹² God's favour depends on God's election and promises (v.5). The rich, who oppress the poor, blaspheme the name of Christ (vv.6-7). By violating one law, the law of love of neighbour, they offend against the whole law (vv.8-11). On the other hand, conscious awareness of the final judgement helps the faithful to fulfill the whole law (v.12).

Then the writer deals with the relation of faith to works. It's been argued that the teaching here, contradicts Paul.¹³ The problem can be understood by considering the different viewpoints of the two authors. Paul argues against those who claim to participate in God's salvation because of their good deeds as well as because they have committed themselves to trust in God through Jesus Christ.

7 [v.3] *The snares of death*: Death is personified here; it attempts to capture the speaker with snares and nets. Cf Ps.18:6.

8 The Psalmist expresses gratitude for God's mercy in saving the Servant in the past; and reaffirms the belief that she/he will walk again with God in 'the land of the living'(v.9).

9 Cf. Pss.113-118

10 "After the psalms had been sung they left for the Mount of Olives – (Mk.14:26).

11 The psalm asserts a pattern of divine action that anticipates a fulfillment in Jesus. Jesus' actions put new life and meaning into the speaker's words. Unlike the psalm speaker, Jesus didn't ask to escape the powers of death. He defied and defeated death (Ac.2:24).

12 *Jm.2:2-4*; cf *Mt.5:3;11:5;23:6;1 Co.1:27-29*

13 Cf *Rm.4:5-6*

The author (James) is aware that proper conduct can only come about with an authentic commitment to God in faith (vv.18 & 26). Many think he was seeking to correct a misunderstanding of Paul's view.¹⁴ Responding to the material needs is simple, hard-headed and practical Christianity. Practical Christianity is attractive and admirable, though not easy to put into practise.¹⁵

James' insistence that faith not put into action is worthless, illustrates the difficulty. Faith without works is dead. In other words, in the context of our current planetary crises, we whose ears have been opened to God's Word '*in the Cry of the Poor and the Cry of Earth*', must use '*our teacher's tongue that we might know how to speak to the weary, a word that will rouse them*'.¹⁶ It means speaking out the prophetic Word we have received, to take up the opportunities God's Word provides us each, to forward the healing and saving of Earth and all its communities.

gospel reading: Mark 8 : 27 – 35

[Peter's declaration and Jesus foretells his death and resurrection]

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?"(27) And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets."(28) He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah."(29) And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.(30)

This episode is the turning point in Mark's account of Jesus in his public ministry. Popular opinion agrees in regarding Jesus as a prophet. The disciples by contrast, believe he is *the Messiah*.¹⁷ Jesus acknowledges his identification with *the Messiah*, but forbids his disciples from making his role known, to avoid confusing it with ambiguous contemporary ideas about the nature of that role.

Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.(31) He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.(32) But

14 For James the proper Christian response is to provide for the bodily needs of the poor. For a Christian to fail to respond to such a challenge is to admit that faith is only a matter of words – all talk and no substance! It's been argued that the teaching here, contradicts St. Paul (cf *Rm.4:5-6*). Paul argues against those who claim to participate in God's salvation because of their good deeds as well as because they have committed themselves to trust in God through Jesus Christ (Paul's concept of faith). Paul understands the implications of true faith for a life of love and generosity (cf *Ga.5:6,13-15*). James is aware that proper conduct can only come about with an authentic commitment to God in faith (cf. *Jm.2:18,26*). Many think he was seeking to correct a misunderstanding of Paul's view.

15 It demands looking fairly and without discrimination to the people encountered in the church and in everyday life. It demands not passing by those in real need and more particularly being sensitive to the hurts and sufferings of all our brothers and sisters.

16 *Is.50:4*

17 [v.29) '*christos*' means '*anointed*' in Greek. It is a translation of the *Hebrew*, '*mashiah*' or '*messiah*'. Peter's response to Jesus' question affirms that he (Jesus) has been anointed king – that he comes to free people – that he comes to establish *the reigning of God*. Others had said that Jesus was a new prophet.

turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things."(33) He called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.(34) For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.(35)

Jesus begins teaching his disciples that he too must suffer, be rejected and killed. He rejects Peter's insistence that God would not let that happen to *the Messiah*. Jesus knew that he was preaching God's Word of Truth to a divided and hostile world. His Word threatened the control and social status of those in positions of religious and political power. They would not be able to let him succeed in *the Way* or *the Truth* he was proclaiming or *the Life of the reigning of God* he was revealing and calling into being. Like *the Servant of God* in Isaiah, Jesus affirms strong faith that God will be present with help and vindication. He insists that he will rise again (v.31). The witness of his love and forgiveness through his suffering and a shameful death, and then of his rising to new, transformed Life, would speak more powerfully of God's good news of loving forgiveness.¹⁸

The Greek word, '*Satan*' translates the Hebrew/Aramaic where it originally meant, '*stumbling block*' or '*obstruction*' (v.33). Peter, must '*get behind* *the Human one* as he goes *his Way*. The disciples are on the side of '*man*'. God does not work with such categories. Jesus is to be *a suffering messiah* and anyone who wishes to follow him must tread his way of suffering. Jesus was not merely announcing *the reigning of God*, as the prophets had done before, but with him, *the reigning of God* has come about! The cross makes clear what is demanded of the disciple. Just as Jesus saw himself as coming to his glory through suffering, ". . . and after three days rise again", so with disciples who are prepared to lose themselves for Jesus and the Gospel.

People around the world who are raising their prophetic voices for *Care of Earth and Care of the Poor*, in these times are enduring the resistance, persecution, suffering, and death we hear about here. They make up a community

¹⁸ Cf. *Mark* 8:24-26 – the disciples were measuring Jesus as '*messiah*' in their own terms of what *the messiah* should be. For them a messiah should be an all-conquering, powerful, political and regal figure. The closer Jesus and his followers get to Jerusalem, the less they seemed to agree on what they ought to do there and the confusion is largely due to their misconception about '*the messiah*'. The entry into Jerusalem probably marks the climax of this misunderstanding. This is confirmed shortly afterwards when at a decisive moment all the disciples abandoned Jesus and run away (*Mk*.14:50). Jesus is *a suffering messiah* (vv.31-33). He is *a messiah* without the flair of a dominating conqueror. The power and energy that surged from his person, spread around him – a field that tended to enclose him in the image of a Zealot messiah. He rejected that. He sets out to confront the Israelite political and religious power at its centre – the Temple at Jerusalem. His messiahship is found in his being '*a suffering Son of man*'. For disciples to understand this, is full vision!

of human martyrs of this age, joining the plants, animals and other species suffering extinction from the effects of humanly-generated climate change.

Pseudo-disciples can begin to speak in an unreal manner and disassociate an inner world called '*faith*' from a real world of actual practise. We can be guilty of defending unreality as something true, good and beautiful. Real faith, like Jesus' own faith, links involvement with others; feels their conditions; and communicates frankly with them in the name of faith. Real faith keeps things real.

for sharing:¹⁹

- *The servant's humiliation and vindication.* Comment on Isaiah 50 : 5 – 9
- *Faith without works is dead.* Comment on James 2 : 14 – 18
- *Peter's declaration about Jesus; Jesus foretells his death and resurrection.* Comment on 8 : 27 – 35

prayer:²⁰

*Loving Creator God,
You have been faithful through billions of years,
patiently preparing Earth to be the nurturing home
for all that dwell on it and in it.
As we come to recognise
the urgent threats to its well-being
from the values and actions of our human community,
we ask you to deepen our trust in Your faithful love.
Send the healing power of Christ.
Give us strength of faith and courage
to speak Your prophetic Word of Truth and transformation,
ready to face resistance, rejection, and suffering
with love, creativity and perseverance.
We make our prayer in the name of Christ Jesus, Your Word,
and in the power of the Holy Spirit,
the Wisdom at work renewing all things in creation,
now and forever. Amen.*

19 Lectio Divina: There are four steps in the traditional practise of *lectio divina*. The steps don't have to have the following order: lectio (reading) – read the passage of Scripture read slowly – more than once. If a particular word, phrase, or sentence seems significant (even if you don't know why) you may want to write it down. meditatio (reflection) – let the significant words fill your mind without straining to analyse them. We are in God's presence and so let the Holy Spirit lead your understanding of the words. oratio (prayer) – allow your heart to speak to God, in words inspired by the passage of Scripture, or by the thoughts that have come to you, while reflecting on it. contemplatio (rest) – let go of ideas and words and allow yourself to rest in the presence of God, in simple and wordless contemplation. This leaflet gives the context and some commentary on each of the readings and the psalm used in the Sunday liturgy. Whatever our preparation for doing this exercise and whatever questions we may use to break open the passage, we must be conscious of Christ's promise: '*Where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*'.

20 The prayer that concludes the Lectio Divina are clearly focused petitions inspired by the readings.

review:²¹

Does our faith in God's presence and faithful protection reflect the faith of the Servant in Isaiah and of Jesus? Can we pray in the spirit of the psalm in gratitude for God's mercy and faithful presence to us in our lives, drawing strength and trust from our experiences? Are we ready to speak out and stand with vulnerable communities under attack for their work and witness for eco-justice? Indigenous communities? Communities of the poor and communities resisting environmental racism? Are we conscious of those who have been killed or have suffered great violence for their work responding to 'the Cry of Earth and the Cry of the Poor?' Who are these prophets in our region? How do their courage and witness affect us? How can they inspire and encourage us to express our faith in God's mission to us to heal Earth in urgent action?

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21 **the review:** – at the end of each reflection the review examines one of the themes of the readings, usually drawn from the gospel, and provides an opportunity to check our own performance, in the light of the Word and Eucharist that we have previously heard and experienced.