

COMMENTARY ON READINGS FOR SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 17, 2006
(Twenty-fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B)
(Isa 50:5-9a; Ps 116; Jas 2:14-18; Mark 8:27-35)

by **Dr. Emilio G. Chávez,**
St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary, Boynton Beach, Florida

These Sunday's readings speak of Jesus' Passion. The first reading is from the third "Song of the Suffering Servant" in Isaiah. Jesus and the early Church saw prophecies here of what Jesus' mission was: to teach in God's Name though this meant persecution and death. Note how in both Isaiah and the Psalm the sufferer has a hopeful confidence that in the end God will vindicate (prove that the sufferer was right and just) and save him.

Jesus asks his disciples who it is that people, including themselves, think he is. The answers are within traditional categories, mostly prophets, but Peter is bold enough to declare that Jesus is the Messiah (the Christ). This category was dangerous, even more so than prophet, because it meant that one claimed, or was claimed to be, a king, and Rome had colonized this area of the world and did not allow any such competition.

But furthermore, Jesus understood his messiahship differently than all others. In his baptism, he had heard his Father's voice proclaiming him his "beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased" (Mark 1:11). To knowers of Scripture, there were echoes here of Messiah (= God's Son, as in Pss 2:7; 89:27-28), but also of the sacrifice of Isaac (Abraham's "only [or beloved] son," Gen 22:2, 12, 16) and of the "Suffering Servant" (see the beginning of the first "Song," Isa 42:1; God is well-pleased with his Servant). So Jesus heard a "terrible," awesome thing in his baptism: how close and dear to his Father he was, and what a sacrifice this would mean! See John 3:16; Rom 8:32.

Peter did not understand this; he thought of the Messiah as indestructible (cf. Mark 10:36). Peter, now called a satan, that is, a tempter seeking to make Jesus deviate from his path, is told literally to "go behind" Jesus, that is *follow* him. In fact, anyone who wants to "go behind" Jesus must deny himself, take up his cross and follow Jesus. One must put one's life at the service of the Gospel. James reminds us that this is a matter of deeds, not mere words. Mere "belief" without obedience to the command to love effectively (see Gal 5:6; 6:2) is worthless, a sham.