

Commentary on Readings for Sunday, October 19, 2003
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The readings for Sunday, Oct. 19, speak of God's love (Hebrew *hesed*, "mercy, extraordinary kindness), which was especially manifested in Jesus, who suffered for us. Like him, we are called to serve others, even at the cost of great sacrifice. The first reading is from the fourth poem of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah (written in the Babylonian Exile around 540 B.C.E.), which was interpreted by Jesus and the early Christians as applying to himself. The responsorial psalm expresses hope and trust in God's *hesed*, which fills the earth. The reading from Hebrews regards the high priesthood of Christ, who, uniquely, is both the Son who through his sacrifice gained access into God's very abode and who, at the same time, is one of us. Jesus suffered and was "tested in every way," so that he can sympathize with us. This double credential (being God's own Son, and human like us) gives us great confidence when we approach God through Jesus. The Gospel recounts the ambitious desire of two important disciples, who, before Jesus' passion, want places of honor in the coming Kingdom (cf. Matt 20:20-23). Jesus does not grant such honors, but does warn that suffering ("cup," see Isa 51:17; being "washed," see Dan 11:35; 12:10, or a "water ordeal," Ps 69:2-3, 15-16) awaits them. Jesus' disciples must not be like pagan despots, but servants like him, the Son of man with full authority (Dan 7:13-14) who came "to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many."