

29th Sunday Ordinary Time Oct 18, 2009 Year B

Is 53:10-11; Ps 33:4-5, 18-19, 20, 22; Hb 4:14-16; Mk 10:35-45

This Sunday we get to refer back to the readings from the two prior Sundays: first, Jesus' restoration of the goodness of creation as originally intended by God before sin brought chaos, disorder and unhappiness, and, second, as we saw last week, how true wisdom is reliance on and obedience to God rather than on ourselves or our possessions. This Sunday God's Word provides further readings that shed light on Jesus' sacrifice which brought us salvation.

The first reading is from the Fourth Servant Song in Isaiah. Humanity was crooked, disobedient, trying to snatch divinity (cf. Gn 3:1-7; Phil 2:5-11). The Servant of Yahweh, Jesus, took the opposite path, divesting himself of his divine prerogatives and taking the form of a slave/servant to the point of a humiliating death on a cross (quite a different use of a tree than that in the garden!). 'Whoever humbles himself will be exalted'. This reverent attitude is joyously and trustingly expressed in our psalm.

Not so the sons of Zebedee (or their mother, in Mt 20:20). 'They are in it for the power, money, etc.' Jesus can only promise them hardship, for which they are ready enough, they say. Jesus then contrasts the world's ways to God's: in the world those who are "great" throw their weight around, but in God's Kingdom (and in the Church, see 1 Pet 5:3, where the same expression translated "lord it over" is used) greatness is achieved by self-giving, humble service, in the same way as Jesus obtained his glory. Jesus' sacrifice consisted in overcoming the human propensity to be better than and to use others; his victory was over human nature, evolution, instinct, even the genetic code. He relied on God and submitted himself to him and to his plan, in which his role was a most overwhelming one: to assume our crookedness (as in Is 53:2-5), our deforming sin *in his body*, as 1 Pet 2:24 says, loving us while we were enemies who hated him (see Rom 5:6-11). This not only gave us an example to follow, and worked a real change in our humanity (which Jesus assumed and transformed and which we act out as members of his Spouse and Body the Church), but it actually opened up for us a new and effective access to God (Hb 10:19-20). When we accept Jesus in faith and identify with him and appropriate him and his sacrifice (including in the Eucharist), the distance between us and God is eliminated (quite the opposite of running away in shame, as in Gn 3:8).