

A reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

The Lord God has opened my ear,
and I was not rebellious,
I did not turn backward.
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.
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;
he who vindicates me is near.
Who will contend with me?
Let us stand up together.
Who are my adversaries?
Let them confront me.
It is the Lord God who helps me;
who will declare me guilty?"



Pause for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

SECOND READING – 24 B

A reading from the letter of Saint James.

Pause – and look up at the assembly

What good is it, my brothers and sisters,
if you say you have faith but do not have works?
Can faith save you?
If a brother or sister is without clothing and lacks daily food,
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?
So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.
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.



PAUSE for **THREE** seconds
then look up at the people
and say SLOWLY:

The WORD of the LORD.

Thanks be to God.

GOSPEL READING – 24 B

The Lord be with you.

And with your spirit.

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark.

Glory to you, O Lord.

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?”
And they answered him,
“John the Baptist; and others, Elijah;
and still others, one of the prophets.”
Jesus asked them,
“But who do you say that I am?”
Peter answered him, “You are the Christ.”
And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him.
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.
He said all this quite openly.
And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.
But turning and looking at his disciples,
he rebuked Peter and said,
“Get behind me, Satan!
For you are thinking not as God does
but as humans do.”
Jesus called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them,
“Whoever wants to become my follower,
let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.
For whoever wants to save their life will lose it,
and whoever loses their life for my sake,
and for the sake of the gospel, will save it.”



The GOSPEL of the LORD.

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.

SCRIPTURES IN DEPTH

Reading I: Isaiah 50:5-9a

The third servant song of Second Isaiah is used also on Palm Sunday, where it ends with verse 7, and is commented upon there in series A (see below*).

The additional words included here run from “he who vindicates me is near” through “who will declare me guilty?” These words tie in with the prediction of the passion in today’s gospel, where Jesus confidently affirms his certainty of vindication (“and after three days rise again”).

***From the Palm Sunday Reading:**

This is the third servant song of Second Isaiah. The situation presupposed is that Israel in exile is rejecting the prophet’s message. The people are “weary” (of his constant predictions of deliverance despite the continuation of the exile?).

But the prophet is undeterred. God has given him the word and he must deliver it, even at the cost of personal suffering. And he is confident that God will eventually prove him right.

In exactly the same way, Jesus’ passion was the outcome of his obedient delivery of the message of the kingdom despite his people’s rejection, and his constant reliance that God would prove him right.

The passion and death of Christ are not isolated events but of a piece with his whole ministry.

The early Church was right in seeing that the servant songs came to rest in the passion and death of its Lord.

Responsorial Psalm: 116:1-2, 3-4, 5-6, 8-9

This section on faith and works is said to correspond to Rachel, who here takes the place of Dan in the exhortations based on the list of patriarchs in [Genesis 49](#). Because of her barrenness (see James 2:17), Rachel gave her maidservant to Jacob, and Dan was the fruit of this association (see [Genesis 30](#)).

The kind of faith that James has in view is not the personal acceptance of God’s saving act of which Paul generally speaks.

With that kind of faith there could be no question of its dissociation from good works. Paul can speak of this kind of faith as naturally and inevitably working through love and producing the first fruits of the Spirit.

James is thinking of a notional assent to orthodox formulas (see Jas 2:19). Such faith, if it is genuine, is bound to issue in good works, otherwise it is barren. Here James agrees with the best teaching of Judaism, with Jesus, and with Paul and 1 John.

Reading II: James 2:14-18

For the next five weeks the second reading will be from the so-called Letter of James. Traditionally

this letter has been accepted as the work James the brother of the Lord, though the author simply calls himself “a servant (slave) of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1:1).

Critical opinion today is divided about the authorship and the date. Although some reputable scholars would defend its traditional authenticity and early date, it is to be noted that there were considerable doubts about it even in the early Church. Probably it was originally a Hellenistic Jewish document containing twelve exhortations based on the names of the twelve patriarchs in Genesis 49 and slightly Christianized in the post-Pauline period by Hellenistic Jewish Christian teacher.

The letter enshrines a good deal of wisdom teaching and brings this to bear against the antinomians (Gnostics?) who in a later generation were appealing to a (wrongly interpreted) Paul. We would date the letter toward the end of the first century.

Today’s excerpt is from the second exhortation, supposedly based on the name Simeon (*shamah*—doers, not hearers only). The sentence beginning “Of his own will . . .” is a place where the author has Christianized the exhortation by inserting a reference to baptism. It is then that the “word,” that is, the gospel, is implanted. But it has to be constantly received anew and made the basis for Christian action.

The word for “religion” is equivalent to “cultus.” The true cultus, James insists, consists in ethical obedience. James does not intend to give an exhaustive description of such obedience but merely to illustrate it.

He does not mean to decry the importance of liturgy—after all, he mentions baptism and the hearing of the word—but he insists that the performance of these must lead to a life of moral obedience and cannot be a substitute for it (see the Old Testament prophets).

Gospel: Mark 8:27-35

The Matthean version of the confession of Peter is used on the twenty-first Sunday of series A. Mark’s version is clearly more primitive. Nevertheless, it too is the result of a process of development.

To reconstruct the original historical event, we start with the fact that it is inconceivable that the post-Easter Church invented the Satan saying, given the fact that Peter was its most revered leader. Jesus must actually have called Peter “Satan.” By why did he do so?

As the text stands, he did so in response to the prediction of the passion: Peter could accept the idea of Jesus as Messiah, but not as a suffering Messiah.

But the prediction of the passion is clearly a post-Easter creation. It makes Jesus identify himself openly with the Son of man and shows a clear knowledge of the events of the passion and the resurrection, reminiscent of the passion narratives in the Gospels. We take it, then, to be a *vaticinium ex eventu*.

The command to silence is a typical piece of Marcan redaction, reflecting his theme of the messianic secret. Remove these two elements—the charge to secrecy and the prediction of the passion—and the Satan saying follows directly upon Peter’s “confession.”

Why, then, would Jesus reject it? He would do so if the term “Messiah” meant a political, nationalistic leader. Jesus consistently rejected that program as a diabolical attempt to divert him from his God-given mission.

Given this meaning of Messiah—and this is the meaning that was current in Jesus' day, before it was appropriated for him after Easter—the Satan saying becomes intelligible.

In the light of the post-Easter faith, however, Peter's confession became a positive confession, acceptable to Christ, and the Satan saying is therefore transferred to Peter's rejection of the idea of the suffering Messiah by means of the passion prediction.

Finally, Mark introduces the motif of secrecy to ensure that the confession "You are the Christ [Messiah]" can only be applied to the crucified and risen One, not to Jesus in his earthly ministry, which would make him merely a divine miracle-worker. Such seems to be the history of the tradition.

A second scene follows—the saying about the cost of discipleship.

Some have thought that the saying about taking up one's cross must reflect a post-Easter situation, but the Greek word *stauros* probably meant originally not the gibbet but the tau (T) or chi (X), the sign of ownership with which cattle were branded.

As such it means here God's seal or sign. In this sense it means "surrender of self-assertion before God and surrender of the autonomous freedom which directs itself against God" (Erich Dinkler). It thus becomes intelligible as an authentic saying of the earthly Jesus.

After Good Friday, however, it acquires a new meaning: assuming one's cross, that is, the life of suffering and martyrdom in union with the cross of Christ.

If it is the evangelist Mark who has combined the two traditions—the confession of Peter and the saying about bearing one's cross—then the whole pericope as it now stands is directed against a wrong understanding of Christological confession and apostleship, one that interprets Jesus as a miracle-working divine man and conceives of apostleship likewise in terms of the divine miracle-worker.

In place of this, Mark puts the confession of Jesus as Christ crucified, and apostleship as following him in bearing the cross, manifesting the dying of Jesus in our mortal bodies, as Paul phrased it.

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