

SECOND SUNDAY IN  
ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

Prayer

*Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-10*

I waited patiently for the LORD; he inclined to me and heard my cry. He put a new song in my mouth, a song of praise to our God.

Many will see and fear, and put their trust in the LORD.

Sacrifice and offering you do not desire, but you have given me an open ear. Burnt offering and sin offering you have not required.

Then I said, "Here I am; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.

I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."

I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; see, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD.

Reading the Word

*First Reading: Isaiah 49:3, 5-6*

And God said to me, "You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified."



And now the LORD says, who formed me in the womb to be his servant, to bring Jacob back to him, and that Israel might be gathered to him, for I am honored in the sight of the LORD, and my God has become my strength—he says,

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel;

I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

*Second Reading:*

*1 Corinthians 1:1-3*

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, to the church of God that is in Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours: Grace to you and peace from God

FIRST READING

Isaiah 49:3, 5-6

PSALM

Psalm 40:2, 4, 7-10

SECOND READING

1 Corinthians 1:1-3

GOSPEL

John 1:29-34

our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

*Gospel: John 1:29-34*

The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him and declared, "Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks ahead of me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him; but I came baptizing with water for this reason, that he might be revealed to Israel."

And John testified, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' And I myself have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God."

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## Hearing the Word

### *“Reassurance”*

During the Christmas season, the Liturgy solemnly celebrated the coming of Jesus into the world, and his presence in the midst of humanity. However, most of the Church’s liturgical year is occupied by “ordinary time” which leads believers through daily life with all its daily joys and troubles, happiness and trials, the mundane and the extraordinary. The liturgy of the Sunday which begins this time provides the necessary reassurance needed to face this long and often challenging journey.

The first reading contains a text known as the first of the four “servant songs” found in the book of Isaiah. In the first song, this “servant” is clearly identified as the people of Israel. However, the prophet does not refer to the nation in general. Rather, he speaks about its part which was chosen by God to be the servant “from the womb.” This phrase recalls the call of another prophet, Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) and indicates that God chose a group from within the Israelite nation and entrusted it with a special mission. The prophetic mission of the Israel-servant was twofold. First, the servant was commissioned to restore the shattered people identified as “the tribes of Jacob and survivors of Israel.” This phrase describes the people of Jerusalem and Judah who have been shattered by the Babylonian aggression in 586

BC, and who were scattered in exile. Second, the servant’s mission extends to the entire world; he was to become “a light to the nations”. This means that the servant was to carry the knowledge of God’s ways to all the peoples of the earth. Isaiah’s description of the servant and his mission suggests that this mysterious figure was, in fact, a group of faithful Israelites who maintained their faith and commitment to the God of Israel in the aftermath of the Babylonian destruction. This group is sometimes referred to as “the remnant of Israel.” Due to its faithfulness and resilience, even in the midst of most desperate circumstances, this unyielding and committed remnant was given the mission of restoration of the nation and of bringing God’s salvation to the entire world. The prophet reassured these faithful Israelites that God not only had not forgotten them, but had even chosen them for this great mission, and God will enable them to carry it out.

The second readings for the next seven consecutive Sundays will be drawn from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians. The Corinthian community was Paul’s “problem child.” The relationship between this Church and its founder is well documented in two long letters to the Corinthians, which reveal a picture of a deeply divided and contentious community. The Corinthians frequently opposed Paul, distorted or refused to

follow his instructions and, at one time, disowned him as their rightful leader. Yet, the Apostle of the Gentiles never disowned them. His first letter was sent in response to no less than seven deep problems that undermined the unity of the community. Surprisingly, he begins the letter not with words of scorn or reproach. Rather, in the first words he addresses the community with a phrase that should be translated, “those who have been made holy in Jesus Christ, and are called holy.” Describing the Corinthians in this way, Paul wants to emphasise the permanency of their Christian identity which they gained by being incorporated into Christ and made a part of God’s holy people. This identity has not been undermined by the Corinthians struggle to remain faithful to Christ, to Paul, and to the Christian way of life. Paul wished to begin his difficult letter with the reassurance that the difficulties that the Corinthians were facing neither deprived them of their status as Christians, nor changed their identity as God’s holy people. What better reassurance could one offer to the struggling Christians?

The Gospel reading has to be read and understood in conjunction with the passage that precedes it, in John 1:19-28. There, John the Evangelist describes a delegation from the Jewish leaders coming to John the Baptist asking whether he was the prom-

ised Messiah. John the Baptist denied that he was the Messiah, and proceeded to explain his identity, which he described as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the one who would be sent to point out the Messiah to the world. The passage from today's reading presents John fulfilling his mission; he publicly pointed to Jesus as the Son of God, and the giver of the Holy Spirit. John the Evangelist placed this episode at the beginning of his Gospel account for the purpose of assurance, and perhaps reassurance, for those who doubted that Jesus was the One promised by God, the promised Messiah and God's own Son. Such doubts must have lurked in the minds and hearts of many early Christians confronted with the proclamation of Jesus' death on the cross. Given his shameful death, could he have truly been divine? One of the purposes John the Evangelist had in writing his Gospel was to provide assurance for the hesitant or doubting ones that despite and through dying on the cross as the Lamb of God, Jesus truly was the God-sent Savior and God's Son.

Entering into "ordinary time", the liturgy provides believers with a powerful assurance that God will remain with them in all circumstances. Isaiah prophesied to "the remnant of Israel" that even when faced with adverse circumstances and seemingly insurmountable challenges,

they had been chosen to carry out God's special mission, and God will empower them to succeed in it. For Paul's troubled Corinthians, their adherence to Christ and the demands of Christian life were an ongoing and daily challenge. Paul reassured them however, that their call to holiness is irrevocable, and that holiness is an on-going project. John the Baptist testified to Jesus' identity, as did John the Evangelist who likely saw and heard Jesus in person. Jesus was God's Son who saved his faithful and now empowers and guides them with the Holy Spirit. Thus reassured, believers can confidently face their daily struggles and say with the Psalmist, "I delight to do your will, my God."

### **Listening to the Word of God**

The Liturgy of the Second Sunday of ordinary time focuses on the theme of reassurance. We hear God reassuring the people about his presence and closeness in words referring to the very beginning of life – God knows us from our mothers very womb. From the moment of conception God made each one of us a special child, entrusted with a particular task and mission in the world. Faced with the difficulties of daily life we need to be constantly made aware of God's constant presence to us. We need to hear and repeat words of reassurance over and over again, particularly when overwhelmed by wor-

ries, hardships, preoccupations and challenges of life. When things do not work out our way, we begin to doubt. When we face tasks that we do not feel capable of handling well, we feel overwhelmed. When we look to an uncertain future, we panic. When we pray and God does not answer we begin to despair. All this makes life rougher and tougher, but these are real emotions we often experience. In response to these, the word of God gives us hope and confidence that God stands with us and we are never left completely on our own. Today God gives us reassurance that even when we are we sad, depressed, ill, unemployed or in difficult relationships we are never truly alone. The Psalmist assures us that the Lord will "bend down and hear my cry."

One way to experience God's reassuring presence is to look at Jesus. In the Gospel we hear about his baptism by John the Baptist. As he was baptized God reassured Jesus by calling him the "beloved Son." Jesus could carry out his mission because God was continuously with him. We became united with Jesus, the Lamb of God, through our own Baptism. In this sacrament we were made a part of God's family. That means that when we are united with Jesus, we are never far from God's presence. As "holy people", as Paul calls Christians, we are united to the Holy God through Jesus. Therefore,



when challenged by life we must look to him for reassurance. Seeing his love for us, love that made him the Lamb of God, we also see the sacrificial Lamb who went to the cross for us. There can be no greater reassurance. As St Paul stated – nothing can separate us from the love of God manifested in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:31-39).

Today, we also hear God speaking to his servant about the mission of being “light to the nations.” This points to our own mission in the troubled world; the mission of restoring confidence in God’s salvation among the doubtful and discouraged and those who have lost sight of God’s presence in their lives. As servants of God, we are commissioned to speak words of encouragement and hope to our neighbours, starting from those nearest to us. These words must contain the reassurance of God’s promises and the invitation to trust and hope in Him. A proverb from Madagascar, “Good words are food, bad words are poison” illustrates what our mission means. It shows that words are very important and can have either a positive or negative impact; there is significance and power in the words. What we say can encourage or bring down. In today’s liturgy God spoke to us words that lift up and give us confidence to face life. Let us speak similar words to one another and be the source or reassurance for one another.

## Proverb

“Good words are food; bad words are poison.”

## Action

### Self-examination

What do I normally do when experiencing feelings of doubt, discouragement and resignation?

Am I a source of support and encouragement for my family, community and friends?

### Response to God

As baptised Christians, our mission is to reflect God’s love through sharing positive and

encouraging words and thoughts which we learn through reading the Word of God. Today I renew my commitment to learn more about God’s ways through reading the Bible, so that I might reassure my brothers and sisters through God’s word.

### Response to your World

I will identify one person who needs encouragement and strengthening in their faith and Christian commitment, and come up with specific plan to offer such support to him or her.

As a group, we will discuss and come up with one practice which will provide reassurance and encouragement for our members. This could well be done through shares biblical passages that encourage and reassure us.

## Prayer

Gracious Father, we thank you for reassuring us of your constant presence and care.

You called us from the womb of our mothers to be your children and servants.

Grant us the Holy Spirit to live a holy life worthy of our calling and make us able to reflect it in our actions and the words of encouragement we speak to one another. We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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