

## TWENTY-FOURTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — B

READING I Is 50:4b-9a  
READING II Jas 2:14-18  
GOSPEL Mk 8:27-35

This passage from Second Isaiah is the third Suffering Servant Song. The Servant is the embodiment of what is best in Israel and describes his prophetic life. He knows God's outlook on reality since, as a disciple, he has carefully listened to the voice of his master and has not given up. The outcome for the Servant is regular mistreatment and abuse. To be exposed to God's Word and to live by God's Word has made him the object of ridicule. But throughout the ordeal, he relies on the Lord as his help. His confidence is total, his trust is unshaken. Indeed, he is willing to challenge anyone and everyone to a court trial. Since the Lord backs him up, he can only be exonerated in any legal dispute. Because the Servant exists for Israel, the God of Israel will ultimately clear him of all false accusations.

The author of James compares living faith and dead faith. Living faith is implemented in daily life. By freely accepting God's revelation (faith), one opens oneself up to God's world of concerns. To wish good luck to a sister or brother but not care for their needs is a powerful analogy of lifeless faith. As Paul puts it, faith makes its power felt through love (see Gal 5:6). To the objection that some specialize in faith and others in works, the author replies: It is simply not true. In cases where works seem to exist without faith, a closer study will show that faith is the very basis of the works.

Mk 8:27-33 is both a beginning and an end. It is an end because it answers the question already suggested in many of Mark's scenes: Is Jesus the Messiah? It is also a beginning since it starts to qualify the type of Messiah. In this case, a suffering Messiah. At the same time, the scene is clearly linked with the cure of the blind man in Mk 8:22-26. The man only gradually regains his sight and, therefore, only gradually recognizes the real Jesus.

What do the outsiders say about the identity of Jesus? After a few suggestions, the insiders are invited to voice their opinion. Jesus' reaction to Peter's use of Messiah; The Christ or the Anointed One (a title with popular overtones of power and prestige), is a violent one. It is at least possible that v. 33 originally followed v. 29. In this case, Peter is a false prosecuting attorney (Satan), whose legal maneuvers stem from humans, not God. In its present form, Mark qualifies Jesus' Messiah as the suffering Son of Man. One recognizes Jesus only when one sees him against the background of the cross and resurrection. Anything else is simply a caricature. Mark then expands on this recognition

by gathering some isolated sayings of Jesus. Discipleship means forgetting self: A radical forgetting symbolized by the cross. Identity means living for others.

Our true identity is revealed by how we serve others. "Who am I and what am I about?" is a common question. Each day we investigate different versions of our own self and ask: "Will the real 'me' please stand up?" The temptation is to view ourselves in splendid isolation. We see our successes, our talents, our achievements as a means to a bigger and better ego. Through this process we identify ourselves as persons only for ourselves, not for others. Yet, our true identity is revealed by how we serve others.

The Suffering Servant asks the same question. He resolved his identity crisis this way: He would be a person for Israel. His prophetic message would be for Israel. His daily pain would be for Israel. Finally, his death would be for Israel. It is the fourth Suffering Servant Song that reflects this identity process: "Yet it was our infirmities that he bore, our sufferings that he endured" (Is 53:4). Our true identity is revealed by how we serve others.

The scene at Caesarea Philippi showed Jesus as person for others. He could not accept identity merely in terms of Messiah because it smacked of power, prestige, and personal aggrandizement. In Mark, he modified that title with suffering Son of Man: "The Son of Man has to suffer much..." He taught that we really find ourselves only when we lose ourselves for others. He also added that we are truly remembered only when we forget ourselves for others. A Jesus for Jesus is no Jesus. In Mark, our true identity is revealed by how we serve others.

Husbands and wives who resolutely think in terms of their spouses have identity. Workers, both married and single, who see their jobs as the opportunity to serve others have resolved the identity crisis. The talented, who regard their gifts as the means of enriching others, know their proper identity. Those who alleviate the pain and frustration of the discouraged and depressed have found their true selves. All such people are bent upon looking to the needs of others. For them, our true identity is revealed by how we serve others.

Eucharist focuses on Jesus' final resolution of the identity crisis. Eucharist symbolizes the scene at Caesarea Philippi. Eucharist reveals a Messiah only by way of a Suffering Servant who teaches his sisters and brothers the art of serving. "My body ... for you, ... my blood for you and all people" answers the question: Who am I and what am I about? Eucharist offers this identity process to the worshipping community. In Eucharist, our true identity is revealed by how we serve others.