

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME — A

READING I Is 49:3, 5-6

READING II 1 Cor 1:1-3

GOSPEL Jn 1:29-34

The Hebrew Testament

The first reading is part of the second Servant Song, which consists of Is. 49:1-4,5b, and an addition (49:5a, 6). As an ideal figure, the Servant represents the best of Israel. He received a call to preach to Israel, and in this song, he explains to the pagans (also part of his audience) that God had a claim on him from the beginning. Though the prophet was assured that God would manifest his glory through him, he still feels rejected and dejected (v. 4). Yet this state is offset by the fact that Yahweh will sustain him in his trial with his enemy, Israel. He boasts: "I am made glorious in the sight of the Lord, and my God is now my strength" (v. 5).

The addition to the poem dwells on both missions of the Servant: To Israel and to the pagans. He will enjoy success not only in Israel but also with the pagans whose light he is.

The Hebrew Testament

Around the spring of 57 A.D., Paul writes First Corinthians. He identifies himself as an apostle because of God's will. Sosthenes was no doubt a Christian who was well known to the Corinthians. The term "church" suggests the Old Testament background where Yahweh has called the Corinthians and they have responded to that call. By accepting Christ, they were made holy. As a result, they are a sacred assembly. "All those who call on the name" is an expression for believers in the divinity of Christ. Paul is certainly contrasting the unity of the Christian Church with the factions at Corinth which necessitated this letter. The salutation "grace and peace" includes: (1) God's favor, especially in Christ; and (2) the result of that favor: Reconciliation with God and neighbor.

The Gospel

The author of John has skillfully combined the sayings of the Baptist with his theological viewpoint. As it now stands, John identifies Jesus as the Lamb of God (v. 29), the pre-existent one (v. 30), and the giver of the Spirit (vv. 32-34). While the Baptist probably understands the lamb to mean the apocalyptic lamb who will wipe out God's enemies (see Rv. 7:17; 17:14), the author probably takes it to mean the lamb as Suffering Servant (compare Is 53:7 with Is 42:1, that is, "chosen one" and "spirit"). He may also understand the paschal lamb as well (see Jn 19:14, 36). For the Baptist, the pre-existent one was perhaps Elijah (see Mai 3:1; Mt 3:12). For the author, the pre-existent one is the Word of the prologue. (Jn 1:1 ff).

John does not mention the baptism itself. Like Mark (but unlike Matthew and Luke), he speaks of spirit, not Holy Spirit. Again, the Baptist is referring to the fiery eschatological preacher of judgment (see Mt 3: 11-12; Lk 3:16-17). The author of John, however, understands spirit as the Holy Spirit that Jesus will communicate to all believers when the moment of his exaltation comes.

According to Jn 5:31ff., there are different channels through which God's testimony to Jesus is conveyed. The Baptist figures prominently as the first such channel.

The Thought

Service is our claim to fame. We ask ourselves how we can make it to the top. We wonder how we can really establish ourselves. Often, we identify in terms of ourselves, not others. Service is our claim to fame.

In Second Isaiah, the Suffering Servant is precisely that — servant. He is the one through whom Yahweh will show his glory. He identifies in terms of bringing Jacob/Israel back to Yahweh. Even when he is made light to the nations, it is so that Yahweh's salvation may reach the ends of the earth. To be glorious in the sight of the Lord is to serve. Service is our claim to fame.

In both the Synoptics (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) and John, the Baptist has a claim to fame because he is the Lord's servant too. His task is to point out the Lamb of God. He does not shrink from taking a back seat because he "ranks ahead of me." His purpose in baptizing Jesus is to reveal Jesus, not himself. Ultimately, he is a witness, and points to someone else. Service is our claim to fame.

For married couples, the most significant word in their title of "Mr. and Mrs." is "and." That conjunction, which implies mutual service, is their claim to fame. For parents, the most significant word in their title of "father and mother of" is "of." Their claim to fame is to identify with their child or children. For bosses and supervisors, the most significant word in their title of "boss/supervisor of" is "of." Their claim to fame is to serve their subordinates. Service is our claim to fame.

Eucharist highlights the Servant, who found his identity by heeding his Father's will. Eucharist focuses on the man who gave not simply something, but himself. Eucharist challenges the community to find its identity by serving the community. Service is our claim to fame.