

A Bible Bullet (aimed at the heart)

Twenty-ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Cycle B
Isaiah 53:10-11; Hebrews 4:14-16; Mark 10:35-45

The Suffering Servant of the Isaiah reading has caused much speculation among scholars over the centuries regarding his identity. Is he Cyrus of Persia, or Zerubabel? Could he be Jeremiah or Isaiah himself? Or could the figure of the servant be only figurative pointing attention to a future leader like Moses of the past or like King David? Was it written as a prophecy about Jesus? This is a writing of the Babylonian exile. It is a message that brings the people comfort and glad tidings during this exile. It speaks of justice after oppression and suffering, forgiveness through suffering, and joy after humiliation.

The reading in Mark tells of the lack of understanding that James and John experienced and their own ambitions. This same story in Matthew has their mother going to Jesus to ask for places of honor for her boys when Jesus establishes his kingdom. Mark's is believed to be the honest report with the blame for ambition falling squarely on their shoulders. Only the cross would reveal to these men and the others what Jesus' kingdom was all about.

It is really the second reading in Hebrews that draws all of these together. It speaks of the perfect high priest "...who has gone through every temptation, in the same way we have, and who is without sin." This allows us to stand in a place of mercy given and grace received. Justice is ours through his suffering, forgiveness through his oppression, and joy after his humiliation. We sometimes are tempted to think that temptation was easily avoided by Jesus because, after all, he was God. On the contrary, temptation would have been more severe for Jesus because he did not fall to sin. The devil tempts us until in weakness we commit sin. Because of Jesus' sinlessness, the

devil tempted him to extremes beyond which any mere human could resist. In every way he was tempted but never sinned. Was ambition a temptation? Of course. Was power a temptation? Of course. Was despair a temptation? Of course. Was every sin experienced by humans a possible temptation for Jesus? Yes, of course. And for that reason he understands our struggle. Because he understands us we can approach our perfect high priest at any time, after any sin, with the assurance that we are loved.