

March 2008

# The Franciscan Legionnaire

Newsletter of the Friars Legion of St. Peter's Church in the Loop  
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## PASSION PROPHECY

**H**oly Week has other names in other languages: among most Slavic nations it is called "Great Week"; one of the German names for it means "Week of Mourning"; and among the Greeks it is formally referred to by the solemn title "Sacred and Great Week." For most of us, it is not a week in full. There was once a time and a place in which only the most necessary work was done from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday and everyone spent at least part of the day in church, hearing mass and attending the services. That time and place, however, is not ours, and the week is a normal work week for most people. Parishes usually schedule services in the evening to accommodate those who wish to attend the Holy Thursday and Good Friday celebrations. We all do what we have to do, but the down side of our abbreviated Holy Week is that the Triduum, which runs from Thursday night through Sunday becomes everything, the only thing. The most common experience of Holy Week is Palm Sunday and then nothing before Thursday and the Evening Mass of the Lord's Supper. We leap over Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, whose Masses are intended to provide us with the necessary introduction and context to the high holy days.

The gospels for those days speak of burial, betrayal, and denial, as those closest to Jesus play their part in bringing him to the cross. Mary of Bethany, sister of Lazarus and a friend of the Lord, anoints his feet with perfumed oil, an odd thing to do to a living man but a normal part of the preparation of a corpse for burial. At the Last Supper, Jesus predicts his betrayal by Judas and his denial by Peter, announcing in be-

tween that this is the long awaited hour when the Son of Man will be glorified. And in the temple, Judas Iscariot meets with the chief priests, receives his pay of thirty pieces of silver and looks for his opportunity to hand Jesus over to them. Mary's prophetic gesture gives us the smell of the grave; Judas' treason sets in motion the forces that will bring Jesus to the cross; and Peter, always the leader and symbol of all the disciples of Jesus, will deny and abandon him to absolute loneliness in his final hours.

As moving and powerful as the gospels are, it is with the first readings for those days – and for Good Friday – that we are concerned here. All of them are taken from the book of the prophet Isaiah, and all of them are oracles on the "servant of the Lord," who might be the prophet himself, or the whole people of Israel, or some one else. In Acts 8:26-40, a minister of the queen of Ethiopia was reading one of these oracles and he asked Philip of whom the prophet was speaking. "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news of Jesus." These four Holy Week readings from Isaiah are fulfilled in Jesus, above all in his death and resurrection, and they form the nearly perfect introduction to our celebration of the paschal mystery. Even if – or, especially if – we cannot make it to mass for the first three working days of the "Sacred and Great Week," we can still read and study them on our own.

**M**onday's first reading is Isaiah 42:1-7. It acts as our introduction to the Servant, an introduction made by God himself: "Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in

whom my soul delights.” God has put his own Spirit on this Servant, and sent him to accomplish his purpose, a purpose that extends beyond the borders of Israel. This Servant will bring God’s own justice not only to God’s people, but “to the nations,” all the way to earth’s end, the coastlands and the islands. Obviously, this Servant is a powerful figure, but he will not exercise his power in a rude and domineering way. In all courtesy and gentleness, he will neither shout out, nor quench the weak and wavering flame, nor break the bruised reed. He will be different from the great ones of the world, and his authority will be expressed in the kind of service that supports and upholds the weak.

God’s servant will bring God’s justice and law to the world, but he is not simply the bearer of that divine message, as if anyone else could be the messenger or announcer of this good news. Here, message and messenger are one and the same, and the Servant is himself the gospel that he proclaims. In the first part of this oracle God spoke to us, introducing his Servant to us, but in the second part he addresses the Servant, telling him, “I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations.” The Servant does not just announce that God has made a new covenant with his people – he is himself that new covenant, for the people of Israel, but also for the whole world, for he will be the light of the nations. This is a curative, a restorative light, which opens the eyes of the blind and sets prisoners free. Nothing is left as it was before.

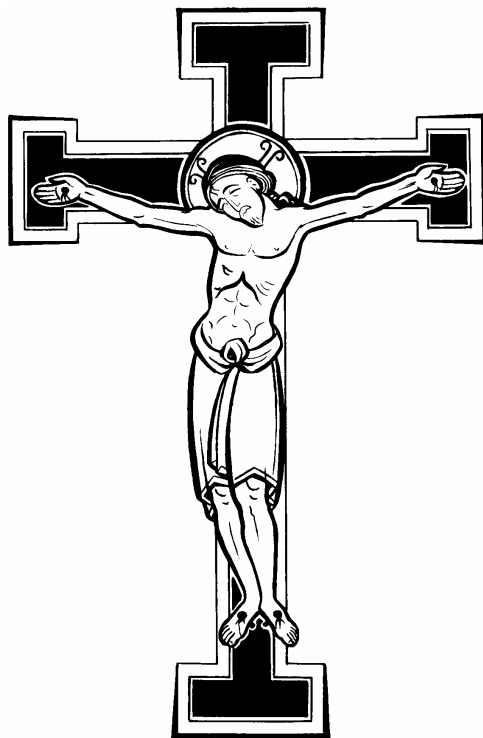
**T**uesday’s prophecy, Isaiah 49:1-6, lets us hear the voice of this Servant for the first time. He speaks to all the earth, to the islands and to peoples from afar. He speaks of himself as one called and named by God from before his birth. Here he uses images that are less gentle

and reassuring than those of the first oracle, images of weaponry: God has made his mouth like a sharp sword, and he himself is a polished arrow in God’s quiver. Yet, as in the first oracle, it is clear that this powerful figure is not at all a spectacular one, not one that attracts the notice and attention of most people. The word “hidden” is used twice – the Servant’s mouth may be like a sharp sword, but he is hidden in the shadow of God’s hand; and though he may be a polished arrow, he is an arrow that is very much hidden away in God’s quiver.

Here also the Servant is named, the only time the author does so in any of these prophecies. The speaker shifts from the Servant to the Servant’s Master and Lord, and God says, “You are my servant, Israel, in whom I will be glorified.” The early Church did not at all regard this identification as an obstacle to seeing Christ in this prophecy; on the contrary, the Church considered

this naming as a confirmation of her Christological reading of the prophet. The Servant is the people of Israel, a corporate personality, as is Christ the Lord. For Jesus is never purely and simply Jesus, in splendid isolation from those who belong to him by faith. He is always the head of his body, which is the Church, and so he too is at once singular and plural, an individual and a community.

Here also we have the first indication that the fulfillment of the Servant’s mission will not mean a life of comfort and ease for him. Once again the Servant speaks and says, “I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity.” But God upholds his right, and through the Servant’s efforts Israel will be gathered to the Lord, and not only Israel. Here again the Servant is called “light to the nations” and he is sent by God “that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth.”



Wednesday gives us the third and briefest of the prophecies, Isaiah 50:4-9a. In these verses the only voice is that of the Servant. He sees himself as the perfect student, the one who perfectly hears and perfectly passes on the word that God speaks, the word that will sustain the weary. The Servant is completely obedient to God, and for this he suffers abuse: "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 shame and spitting."

The Servant is abused, but is no weakling. "I have sent my face like a flint," he says, and his strength is from the God who vindicates him. His sufferings are real and profound, yet so is his confidence in his own innocence and in the final triumph of God's justice.

Good Friday is the setting for the last of Holy Week's quartet of prophecies, Isaiah 52:13-53:12. This is the longest of the oracles, and the most dramatic. The Servant is utterly silent, as he was in the first oracle, nor does anyone speak directly to him. God and the nations take turns talking about him to us.

The first word is God's: my Servant will prosper, in spite of all appearances to the contrary. God acknowledges that the Servant's looks are shocking, his face "so marred, beyond human semblance," that people will instinctively put their hands over their mouths lest they cry out in alarm and fright. Yet this pitiful sight is instructive: in the Servant who suffers, all the nations will see for themselves what no one had told them, and they will understand it at last.

The second section is a chorus of voices, the nations of the world expressing both their shock and their understanding, just as God had said they would. They begin with the question, "Who would believe what we have heard?" The Servant grew up before God, and there was nothing extraordinary in him. Certainly there was no beauty in him, nothing that would commend him to us or make us want to draw near him. Indeed, he had suffered much, and his sufferings, as sufferings usually do, had made him repulsive: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;

and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

And yet, the voices of the world continue, and this is the most shocking thing of all, it was our griefs and sorrows that he bore. We saw him as a poor unfortunate, struck down and afflicted by God, and so he was, but not for anything he had done. "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities." We do not know how, but we know that his sufferings were for our benefit, and that we are better off, infinitely so, because of what he endured. "Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed." That which had been foretold in the first two oracles has now come to pass, and through the Servant's sufferings all people, lost like wandering sheep, have been gathered in to the Lord.

The simile of sheep gone astray reminds the nations of something else about sheep, and they now describe the Servant as a lamb led to the slaughter and as a sheep before its shearers – he was as silent as these dumb animals, he opened not his mouth, he spoke not a word in his pains. As the first prophecy had said, he did not raise his voice in the streets, he did not protest or bewail his fate. He was led away, quietly, and we thought that was the end of him. He was honest and peaceable, but they buried him with the wicked. Yet death did not have the last word with him. In obedience to God, he made himself an offering for sin, and the Lord, speaking at the end, affirms again that his Servant will prosper, that he will have his portion with the great, and that his days will be long and his descendants many. He will still win pardon for sinners.

Four prophecies from Isaiah, four oracles spread out over four days in Holy Week. In them the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus is drawn up before us like nowhere else. The Great Week is a work week for most of us, and we may not be able to come to church to hear these read at Mass. But we all have bibles, and one way or another we can make sure that these words of Isaiah go with us into the holiest days of the Church year.

—Fr. Bob Sprott, O.F.M.



### MEMORIAL VOTIVE LIGHTS

The action of prayer is often accompanied by the gesture of lighting a candle. The candle becomes an offering to the Lord, a sign of the offering of ourselves that we make to God whenever we come before him with a special intention or petition. After a while, we must leave the church to be about other business, but the candle stays, burning constantly in the church even as our prayer remains in the presence of the Lord.

Your gift to Saint Peter's for the year-long memorial votive light helps to support all of our ministry and works. And on our part, you and your intentions are remembered daily in our prayers for our helpers and benefactors.

#### APPLICATION FOR YEAR-LONG MEMORIAL CANDLE

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

To be lit in honor of: \_\_\_\_\_  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Requested by: \_\_\_\_\_

Date candle is to be lit: Immediately \_\_\_\_\_ Specific Date \_\_\_\_\_

The offering for the Memorial Candle is \$150.00. Please enclose a check for the full amount with this form.



#### MEMBERSHIP IN THE FRIARS LEGION *brings with it...*

- A sharing in all of the more than 40 masses offered at Saint Peter's each week
- A sharing in the daily Lauds and Vespers prayed by the Franciscans of Saint Peter's Friary
- A sharing in the Eucharistic Novena of nine Tuesdays before the Feast of Saint Anthony of Padua on June 13
- A special Eucharist offered for the living members on the Feast of Saint Anthony on June 13 and on the Feast of Saints Peter and Paul on June 29
- A special Eucharist offered for the deceased members on All Souls Day on November 2 and on the Commemoration of All the Deceased of the Franciscan Order on November 5
- A sharing in all the ministry and good works done by the Franciscan Friars at Saint Peter's, whom you support by your generosity



#### APPLICATION FOR PERPETUAL ENROLLMENT IN THE FRIARS LEGION

*(Please print, leaving a space between each word.)*

Please Enroll: \_\_\_\_\_  
as a Perpetual Member of the Saint Peter's Friars Legion.  
Living \_\_\_\_\_ Deceased \_\_\_\_\_

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip Code: \_\_\_\_\_

OFFERING: Individual, \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ Family, \$100.00 \_\_\_\_\_ *(Immediate family, parents and children)*