

The Twentieth Sunday of Pentecost

October 22, 2006

Isaiah 53:4-12

Psalm 91 or 91:9-16

Hebrews 4:12-16

Mark 10:35-45

In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Lord, what will we have?” Peter has finally summoned up the courage to ask Jesus, somewhat belatedly, “What’s in it for me?” Well, to give Peter his due, he has made a major commitment to Jesus for quite some time. They have logged a lot of miles together. I’m sure Peter feels that those miles are worth something, and being one of us, Peter can see only the worldly and the material. “We’ve left everything,” he says. “Don’t we deserve something?” Of course they do, Peter and James and John and all the others will have their reward, but not here, not now. Their reward will be in the kingdom of God that their teacher constantly proclaims.

That answer may have satisfied Peter but not James and John; they want some specific guarantees. They want assurances of positions of real honor and authority in that Kingdom of God. They want reserved seats on the right hand and the left hand of the throne.

What do you suppose they visualize as the Kingdom of God? A great, golden realm ruled by a mighty king who dispenses justice and punishment from a grand throne, surrounded by His court, principally James and John. How can they have such an image? It has to do with what kind of Messiah you are expecting.

James and John aren't alone in this. Many, many people in Israel saw the role of the Messiah as a conquering Oriental king who would restore them all to power and glory and wealth, as a new David who would reign in splendor. They wanted a return to the "good old days" of the kingdom of Israel.

If that's what James and John are thinking, it isn't difficult to see how they could hear Jesus in a vastly different way. He has already told them of His impending death. To them, in their mindset, Jesus' death would have to be some sort of painless, seamless transition to glory. No conquering king in their experience could be tried and crucified. It had to be much cleaner and neater than that.

But Jesus is not that conquering King Messiah. Jesus speaks of another ancient tradition in Israel; He speaks in the voice of one called the "suffering servant," the one who suffers and dies for the sins of the nation of Israel.

Isaiah speaks of that sort of Messiah. The words are not "glory and power" but "wounded, oppressed, afflicted, beaten, mocked, scourged." That Messiah is "silent before his oppressors – the Sanhedrin, the mob, Pilate – and empties Himself even to death, a sacrifice to atone for our sins."

That suffering for the life of us all is Jesus' Baptism; that death is the cup Jesus will drink; no gold thrones or silver chalices for Jesus. That is what James and John and countless others will share with their Messiah. Jesus will enter His glory not in a flash of fire but through His pain and sacrifice.

Jesus' sacrifice is not made to gain a place for James and John at the left hand and the right hand of God; His sacrifice is not made to secure His own place before the throne. His sacrifice is made in the service of all humanity as a ransom for the sins of eternity.

His sacrifice is made for you and for me.

In His Holy Name.