

Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Apr 15th 2014

This Tuesday of Passion Week, we begin to follow Jesus as he interacts with his disciples during the Last Supper. Today's Gospel passage focuses on Jesus' prophecies about Judas' betrayal and Peter's denial. He knows of Judas' plan to turn him over to the religious authorities. (To compel Jesus to assert himself as a revolutionary? To profit somehow from the inevitable rejection of Jesus? We can only guess Judas' motive.) Jesus also knows of Peter's weakness and how, after the arrest in the garden, that weakness will lead to his denial of even knowing Jesus. And still Jesus allows the betrayal and the denial to unfold without exposure or confrontation. Why? Because he trusts the Father, as we learn from Luke's report of the word from the cross, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit."

Jesus may also be sustained by the vision of Isaiah expressed in today's first reading, the passage we have come to call the Second Servant Song. It is clear from the other parts of the New Testament that the Evangelists, and Paul too—when they wrote after Easter--understood Jesus to have fulfilled the role of Isaiah's Suffering Servant. It is also likely that Jesus understood his role as Messiah as fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. For though the Servant had reason to despair ("I thought I had toiled in vain, and for nothing, uselessly, spent my strength"), he is assured by the Lord God that he will not only restore the tribes of Israel ("It is too little . . . for you to be my servant, to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and restore the survivors of Israel") but, even more, he will become "a light to the nations that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

However much Jesus, in his humanity, may have envisioned this outcome, ever since Easter and Pentecost, Jesus' followers have applied these prophetic verses to interpret and proclaim the mission of the Church after the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The fact is, Jesus was able to sustain the betrayal and denial of some of his closest friends and that outcome of gathering the people of Israel and enabling his followers to become a *lumen gentium*, "a light to the nations."

Lord Jesus, what happened to you in the betrayal and denial of friends, will likely happen to us as well, as we try in our own frail way to collaborate in your mission of being a light to the nations. Help us to hold up under those disappointments and to trust that our small efforts to follow you will somehow fit your larger plan of nothing less than the salvation of the world.

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