

THE SERVANT IS PRESENTED

Isaiah 42. 1-7

John 12. 1-11

I speak to you in the name of  the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

When we consider our Old Testament text from Isaiah, it is important to understand the context in which these words are given. God the Father, the Holy One, is actually speaking in heaven before a divine council; and in the opening verses of chapter 42, he presents his Servant. Some commentators insist that the ‘Servant’ whom God is presenting is Abraham, or even the remnant nation Israel; but as we read on, it soon becomes clear that our Father is talking about his Perfect Servant, Jesus Christ.

This Perfect Servant is the one ‘in whom God’s soul delights’. We cannot help but be reminded of our Lord’s baptism, as described in the gospel of Mark, where the Father is overheard to say, ‘You are my Son, the Beloved, with you I am well pleased’ (1. 11). Jesus, the Perfect Servant, is fully supported by God, is fully pleasing to God, and is fully endowed by God. This same Servant has received God’s Holy Spirit; and indeed, we remember that the accounts of the baptism of Christ indicate that God’s Spirit descended upon him like a dove (Lk 3. 22, Jn 1. 32).

The main task given to this Servant, says the Lord, is to bring ‘true justice to the nations’. This is welcome news to God’s people. ‘Justice’ here is a rather bigger thing than what we normally associate with this word. It has to do with the order God has given to the whole universe by his creative acts; it refers to the maintenance of the position of God’s people (Israel) in the world as a nation in a special relationship with God; and it proclaims the truth about the Lord’s sovereignty over history being established. ‘Justice’ will ensure that God’s plans for his people are put into full effect and will make the truth about the Lord known everywhere.

This Servant will, moreover, be a 'covenant' and a 'light'. It is through him that God's purposes will be realised, by the opening of blind eyes, the freeing of the captives, and the release of those who sit in darkness. In short, the Servant will undo all the horrendous and degrading effects that sin has on the human race and restore to people their true freedom and dignity as sons and daughters of God.

As we journey with our Lord at the beginning of this Holy Week, we can be heartened. Jesus is indeed making his way to the Cross; but as he does so, he reveals more than ever that he is the Perfect Servant; and Christ's humble, obedient mission will result in nothing less than eternal justice and true freedom for God's people.

Amen.