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Sunday Mass Study Notes for Lectionary 21: 01/11/2026



This week, we will again examine Isaiah and a prophecy concerning Jesus. Then, we will move on to a study of Jesus' baptism and discuss His nature as both God and Man, along with his radical obedience to the Father's plan for His life. Because of the concepts covered in the readings, we are going to change the analysis order so that we cover the first reading, the Gospel reading, and finally the second reading.

Introduction to the First Reading:

The first reading is from Isaiah 42, the alternate is from chapter 40 and won't be covered today. This is the first of what is known as Isaiah's "Servant Songs." This first song continues past the end of today's reading in verse 7 to verse 10. The Servant Songs prove in a powerful way that Jesus of Nazareth is God's Righteous Servant, the long-awaited Messiah. The preceding context is the preparation for Judah's return from captivity in Babylon, which we know happened during the time

of Nehemiah. As you read, take careful note of the characteristics of the Servant.

First Reading:

> *Isaiah 42:1-7 NAS95 1 "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 "He will not cry out or raise His voice, Nor make His voice heard in the street. 3 "A bruised reed He will not break And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish; He will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 "He will not be disheartened or crushed Until He has established justice in the earth; And the coastlands will wait expectantly for His law." 5 Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out, Who spread out the earth and its offspring, Who gives breath to the people on it And spirit to those who walk in it, 6 "I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I will also hold you by the hand and watch over you, And I will appoint you as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations, 7 To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon And those who dwell in darkness from the prison.*

Isaiah said in verse six that God's Servant would be a light to the nations, which means to the Gentiles. Last week, we discussed the revealing of this marvelous mystery, that the Messiah would bring salvation not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles. Here, God reaffirms that message and states that the Messiah would be appointed "as a covenant to the people, As a light to the nations (Gentiles), To open blind eyes, To bring out prisoners from the dungeon, And those who dwell in darkness from the prison" (vv. 6e-7). God compared the spiritual darkness of the Gentiles with blind people (7a), and with those in prison living in darkness (v. 7b-ff). Note that the only person in that society who would have had the authority to free an entire people group from prison was the King. Also, remember that the prisons were gruesome, dark places in those days. Isaiah said that the future Servant, whom we know as Jesus, would exercise kingly authority to free prisoners from darkness. Saint Paul confirms this by saying, "For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col 1:13).

You may wonder what Isaiah meant in verse 3 when he said, "A bruised reed He will not break, And a dimly burning wick He will not extinguish." A lack of social justice was one of the primary themes of Isaiah, with widows and orphans especially oppressed (Isaiah 1:17). The reed referred to the weak people of the world, those wounded souls who genuinely need and seek the Messiah to save them. The "dimly burning wick" was symbolic of something that would have to be nurtured to keep going, a tiny flame that required kindling to make enough of a fire for a person to use. The Messiah won't stamp out the flame; He will enliven it! In fact, Jesus quoted the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) version of this text to prove that His coming fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy. Jesus

said, "A BATTERED REED HE WILL NOT BREAK OFF, AND A SMOLDERING WICK HE WILL NOT PUT OUT, UNTIL HE LEADS JUSTICE TO VICTORY" (Matthew 12:20).

What does this Servant Song mean for us today? First, we can be sure that Jesus fulfilled this prophecy and came as the servant Messiah. The delight of the Father was on Him, and the Spirit of the Lord was in Him. This same Messiah, the Righteous One, is the One in whom we put our trust to bring us salvation. He is worthy of our worship, our faith, and our surrender. Second, as we surrender, we can trust that He will not take advantage of our weakened condition. In fact, on the contrary, He will nurture us and bring us to a place of fuller relationship with the Father. He will enliven what little faith we have as we open our hearts up to Him to do His good work in us. Lastly, the message of salvation is not just a theoretical freedom from the stranglehold of sin, but an experiential reality that Jesus wants us to grow up into. He has set us free from the tyranny of sin, and we no longer need to live in the dark prison that Satan had us in. Unfortunately, many of us do not know of this freedom and continue to live in the dungeon of guilt, worry, and fear. "If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed" (John 8:36).

Introduction to the Gospel Reading:

As we move on to the second reading and the Gospel message, I would like to share some background on the key figures in Church history to better understand the occasion of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. One of my hobbies has been the study of Church history, especially the main characters who played a role in shaping the doctrines held by Christian believers in the times that would become their future. In some cases, these characters postulated theological theories that, with adequate biblical support, became accepted by the early Church. Yet others proposed heretical ideas that, during their opposition by the Church, led to the unexpected result of calcifying the Church's true beliefs. In essence, when incorrect theological ideas arose, the church was forced to examine its presuppositions and beliefs more closely, clarifying what it believed. For example, Marcion of Sinope, who was the son of an early bishop, proposed an early and incorrect canon of the Bible that ultimately led the Church to respond with one that the early Church leaders accepted. Another in this latter category was Nestorius, Archbishop of Constantinople, who later denied the teaching for which he was accused and proposed that the human Jesus and the divine Christ were two different persons. He was condemned at the Council of Ephesus in 431. This brings us to a fellow named Eutyches, whose teachings are essential for understanding today's Gospel message.

Eutyches was a presbyter of Constantinople and opposed Nestorius at the Council of Ephesus. He

founded the teaching known as Monophysitism which said that Jesus had only one nature, rather than maintaining His divine nature and adding a human nature after his birth through Blessed Mary (Luke 1:48). Eutyches said that Jesus' human and divine natures were combined into the single nature of Christ "without any alteration, absorption or confusion: that of the incarnate Word." While some may maintain that this is theological hair-splitting, similar to asking "How many angels can fit on the head of a pin," it is extremely important that we understand the nature of Jesus. If Jesus wasn't fully man, then how could he have fulfilled the Law? He also wouldn't have understood what it was like to live in our fallen world. If Jesus wasn't fully divine, He couldn't have atoned for the sin of the entire world. Jesus said, "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish them, but to fulfill" (Mt 5:17). And the author of Hebrews said, "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Heb 4:15). Somehow, Jesus was both fully man and fully God. The response of the Church to Eutyches was to formulate doctrine along the lines that Jesus was a unified whole being Who consisted fully of both human and divine natures without defining some magical quotient of the degree of mixing of the two. Jesus was 100% human and 100% divine! To say anything less would violate the clear teaching of Scripture.

Jesus emptied Himself of the independent use of His divine attributes during His earthly ministry. We see this in Paul's Letter to the Philippians.

> *6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:6-8)*

Let's step back and summarize, since we are juggling many balls in the study today. We spoke about Isaiah's prophecy that Jesus would be God's Righteous Servant, acting as light to Gentiles, all people, and One who would free the poor and oppressed people from spiritual darkness. In our overview of some important historical figures of Church history, we discussed the controversy over the nature of Jesus brought about by Eutyches, which led the Church to formulate a theology about Jesus' nature, consisting of both human and divine as a unified whole Being without a formula to the degree of mixing between the two natures. As we move to the Gospel reading, we will see that since Jesus was 100% human (and 100% divine, how can that be?), as God's Righteous Servant, He would have to submit Himself to the full measure of the Law. This meant living in submission to the plan of salvation predicated by His Father, which included the program of John the Baptist as the forerunner in the spirit of Elijah. As we will see, Jesus submitted to John's baptism of repentance to demonstrate his full compliance with the Father's divine plan.

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Gospel Reading:

> Matthew 3:13-17 NASB: [3] *Then Jesus *arrived from Galilee at the Jordan coming to John, to be baptized by him.* [14] *But John tried to prevent Him, saying, "I have need to be baptized by You, and do You come to me?"* [15] *But Jesus answering said to him, "Permit it at this time; for in this way it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he *permitted Him.* [16] *After being baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened, and* [a] *he saw the Spirit of God descending as a dove and* [b] *lighting on Him,* [17] *and behold, a voice out of the heavens said, "This is* [c] *My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased."*

Jesus had to fulfill all righteousness, and part of that was submitting to John's baptism of repentance. The Jews of that era were used to *repeated* ceremonial washings. However, John's baptism represented a person's *one-time* public confession of repentance, a willingness to turn from their sin and to the plan of God for their lives. Even though Jesus was sinless in His essence as God, He had to live a perfect, sinless life as a man, and this meant submitting to the Father's will through the ministry of John the Baptist. Otherwise, when King Herod came to kill all of the infants, as we saw last week, Jesus' death would have atoned for the sin of the world, and that would have been the end of His ministry. "But God" had other ideas, and Jesus submitted to the Father's wishes. "For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). We can celebrate that Jesus was willing to submit to the Father's plan.

As we make the sign of the cross, we can remember Jesus' baptism and how it demonstrated the reality of the Holy Trinity. We saw during the baptism that the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus the Son like a dove (v. 16e). The Father announced, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased" (v. 17b). God said through Isaiah in the first reading, "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him" (Isaiah 42:1). God is delighted in His Righteous Servant. He delights in us as servants of the Lord Jesus.

Introduction to the Second Reading:

This reading is from Acts 10; the alternate reading from Titus 2 won't be covered. As we finish the second reading, note what we said earlier about Isaiah's prophecy of the freedom of the Gentiles living in darkness, and how Jesus was obedient to God as a Servant, even submitting to baptism by John the Baptist.

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Second Reading:

> *Acts 10:34-38 NAS95 34 Opening his mouth, Peter said: "I most certainly understand now that God is not one to show partiality, 35 but in every nation the man who fears Him and does what is right is welcome to Him. 36 "The word which He sent to the sons of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ (He is Lord of all) — 37 you yourselves know the thing which took place throughout all Judea, starting from Galilee, after the baptism which John proclaimed. 38 "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed Him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and how He went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.*

Peter said that God's offer of salvation through faith in Jesus was available to everyone, Jews and Gentiles alike. He said that God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and power (38b). Read verse one from the first reading in Isaiah again. "Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul delights. I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations" (Isaiah 42:1). Do you see how precisely the prophecy was fulfilled through Jesus? This is the One in whom we trust.

Reflection Questions

1. When Jesus went to John to be baptized, he publicly stated his willingness to submit to the Father's plan through whatever form it would take. Though the Scriptures didn't seem to foretell the event of Jesus' baptism, there was plenty of prophecy regarding the obedient nature that God's Servant Messiah would take. Reflect upon the following verses from Isaiah regarding our Suffering Servant, the Lord Jesus.

> *1 Who has believed our message? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? 2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, And like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty That we should look upon Him, Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; And like one from whom men hide their face, He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. 4 Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed. 6 All of us like sheep have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all To fall on*

> *Him. 7 He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off out of the land of the living, For the transgression of my people to whom the stroke was due? 9 His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the LORD was pleased To crush Him, putting Him to grief; If He would render Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:1-11)*

How does understanding the radical obedience of Jesus empower you to answer the calling that God has placed upon your life?

2. In what ways have you made a public profession of your faith? As the New Year dawns, in what ways could you accomplish this during the upcoming year?