

Psalm 22 may very well be the pre-eminent of all the Scriptures sung and read in Holy Week. There are other contenders. Historically Exodus 12 and the recounting of the Passover was read on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and at the Easter Vigil. This year we will hear that at two of those three. Even more prominent with its vivid description, indeed, as though the prophet were standing there beside St. Mary and John at the foot of the cross is Isaiah chapter 53. Perhaps more hymn texts and choral motets derive from Isaiah 53 than any other Passion text. In our hymnal, 13 hymns list Isaiah 53 as a textual basis.

But even if not the pre-eminent text overall, it is certainly the chief Psalm. Significant portions of it serve as today's introit and tract. In four days as the conclusion of the Divine Service on Maundy Thursday, Psalm 22 in its entirety will be sung as the altar is stripped, a visual portrayal of all glory and beauty, everything, being taken away from our Lord recounting that He was forsaken by His disciples and seized by those who hated Him, and so entered into the depths of His humiliation.

In many churches on Good Friday portions of Psalm 22 are heard again at Tenebrae Vespers. Though that is not the case here this year, we do hear every year in St. John's Passion the explicit fulfillment of verse 18, "**They divided My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.**" Shortly thereafter we are told by St. John that Jesus cries out "**I thirst**" to fulfill the Scripture. The Passion accounts teach us read and hear them in light of Psalm 22. And thus what we see fulfilled here in this parched cry is verse 15 of Psalm 22: "**My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue sticks to My jaws.**"

It is not simply that so many of the details are given in Psalm 22. Again, Isaiah 53 describes theologically what is happening, makes clear what so many want to deny, that in His Passion and Crucifixion, it is not merely the blows and stripes inflicted by men, but the chastisement that brought us peace was that it is the Father, the will, plan, and purpose of the Father to crush and put the Son to grief in our stead.

What makes Psalm 22 central and pre-eminent is that here it is no third-person description of the agony of the Lord. It is not as St. John recounting what he saw as an eyewitness, nor as Isaiah, seeing ahead through time by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. No, in Psalm 22 we are given the direct speech of the Son of God, given through David as a human secretary, recording prophetically the Messiah's own interior thinking and feeling. We have here Jesus' own account of His Passion.

The tract especially presents to us the pointed and painful history of the Passion as particularly told by St. Matthew, the opening words of Christ's agony not from any physical torture, but the suffering of total abandonment by His Father. Then not only the statement of suffering scorn, but already, nine-hundred years before the events occurred, the very words of mockery cast at the Lord as He hangs upon the cross.

The Lord recounts that whereas God heard the cries of the fathers of Israel, acted to free them from bondage in Egypt, fed and gave them drink in the wilderness despite all their complaining and rebellion, gave them the land of Canaan and delivered them from the enemies who attacked and oppressed them even though it was as judgment for their own sin, each doing as was right in his own eyes, now, with the beloved Son of the Father, the exact imprint of the Father's nature, doesn't count His equality with God something to be grasped, insisted upon, giving ever present relief and deliverance. No, He takes on the form of a servant. Suffers unjust humiliation by men, and bears what no man ever has: He calls upon God,

and is not heard. He cries out, and the ears are shut. He is given over to suffer the agony of hell, abandonment by God.

We hear the voice of our Lord in midst of bearing this. And that He has done this, suffered and accomplished this for us, in our place, in our stead, is what is now recounted to all the generations that have come. This is what we praise and magnify the Lord for. The Lord's Passion is no cause of shame but our boast. We rejoice this day not in delusion or false hopes of worldly deliverance that will be dashed by week's end. We as Christian people rejoice this day because we see the true King coming into the city that rejects the Word of the Lord, that kills the prophets, precisely that He Himself might be rejected and killed, to bear and suffer all for His people of all time

We call it Palm Sunday, and the branches in our hands are certainly memorable, indeed, a joyous reminder in our homes year round of our King and what He has done to save us. But the theme and focus of today, as it is for every Divine Service, is given in the Introit: **“But be not far from Me, O LORD, You are My strength; hasten to help Me. Save Me from the lion's mouth, and My soul in misery from the among the horns of the wild oxen. My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me, and are so far from My cry, and from the words of My complaint?”** The central thought already today is the agony of the Messiah, His crying out to His Father, but receiving no answer, no deliverance from what befalls Him.

This is because every day of Holy Week, as every Sunday, the whole story is in view. Even as this week we do slow down and follow in real time as it were, the day by day events, we know and observe each day in view of the whole. So today, with the triumphal entry, where Jesus is going, what will happen in Jerusalem, what He will do, is in view. On Good Friday, as we engage in the most direct contemplation of our Lord's suffering and death, we do not pretend as though we do not know how it turns out. And even on Easter Sunday, we do not forget the crucifixion. The holy angel, announcing the resurrection to the women, identifies Jesus as the crucified One, and in resurrected glory, from that Easter morning and unto eternity, our Lord bears the glorious wounds by which He purchased our salvation.