

exploring

THE SUNDAY READINGS

YOUR GUIDE FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL 2009

Written by ALICE CAMILLE

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OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray... God of power and passion, you so loved the world that you surrendered your only Son to break the bonds of sin and death. We praise you for this unsurpassable gift! *Amen.*

April 5 |

LECTIONARY 38B

PALM SUNDAY OF THE LORD'S PASSION

OUR ROLE IN THE STORY

FIRST READING

ISAIAH 50:4–7

The Lord God has given me a well-trained tongue, that I might know how to speak to the weary a word that will rouse them.

What is your special gift, the thing it seems you were born to do? In a movie that spoofs the superhero genre, *Mystery Men*, the character played by William H. Macy wants to think of himself as superhero material. “I’m ‘The Shoveler!’” this normally humble man insists to his wife. “I shovel very well.” In the long run, the Shoveler and others like him demonstrate that they are exactly the people their city needs.

The character identified as the Lord’s faithful servant in Isaiah’s prophecy identifies his special gift as “a well-trained tongue.” When he speaks, hearts are lifted from the gloom of despair into the energized realm of hope. Because this servant has the superhero-like capacity to move hearts, he uses it, even at great personal cost: beatings, insults, and shame. As we enter the holiest week of the year, we are invited to identify ourselves as God’s faithful servants and to use our gifts—however grand or humble—to become the men and women our community needs.

» *Prayerfully consider your gifts (or each other’s gifts, if you’re part of a group). Identify the one thing you seem to have been born to do.*



SECOND READING

PHILIPPIANS 2:6–11

Christ Jesus, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped.

If you could be anything you wanted

to be—without limits—what would you choose? If we polled the average assembly, we’d find people who secretly wish to be rock stars, athletes, artists, actors, billionaires, presidents, or even part of a royal family on some obscure and tranquil island. Relatively few people would deliberately choose obscurity. Almost no one would choose poverty. And who would ever dream of taking up the life of a slave?

Christ Jesus, Paul argues, enjoyed a reality without limits in the form of God. What could be better? Yet refusing the rights and privileges of this position, the divine Son loosened his grasp on eternity and entered time. Christ surrendered divinity for mortality. Jesus took on flesh and blood, in all its dreadful vulnerability. And denying even the privilege of kingship, priestly lineage, and material wealth, Jesus walked the earth as a man without family, home, or purse. In the end, he gave up his freedom and beggared himself to the will of frightened people in positions of power. Who would choose as he chose?

» *Compare the common human struggle for upward mobility with the downward mobility of Jesus. How should we follow this Lord?*