

Behold My Servant

Isaiah 42-45

WHAT WE FOUND

God presented his Servant: upheld, chosen, delighted in, Spirit-carrying, and tasked with bringing justice to the nations by the strangest method in the history of power: *“He will not cry or lift up his voice... a bruised reed he will not break, and a dimly burning wick he will not quench”* (42:2-3). Matthew quotes the heart of the job posting, Isaiah 42:1-4, his longest formal Old Testament citation, over Jesus healing crowds and refusing publicity (Matthew 12:15-21): the unshouting Servant, identified by name (CCC 713). And a complication we are not yet allowed to resolve: Isaiah also calls *Israel* the servant (41:8; 44:1), while the Servant of the songs seems to be more than Israel. We wrote the tension in our margins and kept reading.

Chapter 43 was spoken over exiles who had earned their exile, and over us: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine... When you pass through the waters I will be with you... Because you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and I love you.”* The Church’s baptismal typology naturally gathers these waters (CCC 1220-1221 read Israel’s crossings as baptism prefigured): read the passage with your own name in it, for it describes what your baptism did. We banked 43:25 for later: forgiving sins is God’s own doubled-emphatic prerogative, *“I, I am He who blots out your transgressions,”* which makes a certain scene in Capernaum (Mark 2) more explosive than it looks.

We laughed at the carpenter who roasts dinner over half a log *“and the rest of it he makes into a god”* (44:16-17), and then did the arithmetic on ourselves with the Catechism’s inventory of modern franchises: power, pleasure, money, the state (CCC 2113), and their modern cousin, image. We met the most surprising hire in Scripture: Cyrus of Persia, called *“my shepherd”* and *“his anointed,”* God’s instrument *“though you do not know me”* (45:1-5). And we ended at the summit: the fiercest monotheistic oath in the Old Testament, *“To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear”* (45:23), and Paul, a strict Pharisee, quoting it with Jesus installed at its center: *“at the name of Jesus every knee should bow... every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord”* (Philippians 2:10-11; CCC 449). We tested the strongest objection, that this makes Jesus a mere exalted agent, and found it collides with Isaiah himself: *“My glory I give to no other”* (42:8). Either heaven broke that oath, or the Son was never *another*: true God from true God, within the one divine life. The first Christians, fierce monotheists who died rather than worship Caesar, sang hymns to Christ. That is either mass idolatry or revelation.

VOICES OF THE CHURCH

St. Thérèse of Lisieux • *Story of a Soul*

God does not break what is bent or snuff what barely burns; he stoops to weakness, and it is precisely our littleness, offered with confidence, that draws down his mercy. Souls afraid they are too damaged for God have, on the authority of Isaiah 42, exactly the qualifications the Servant is looking for.

St. Hilary of Poitiers • *On the Trinity*

Scripture's monotheism is not embarrassed by the Son but expressed in him: the honors and worship Isaiah reserves for God alone are, in the Gospel, rendered to Jesus without protest from heaven, because the Son is not a second god beside the LORD but the LORD's own eternal Son. Read with him, Philippians 2 is not an exception to Isaiah 45 but its unveiling.

St. Cyril of Jerusalem • *Catechetical Lectures*

Israel's water-crossings are the baptized person's biography in advance: the waters that could not overwhelm because God was in them. What Isaiah promised the exiles, *when you pass through the waters I will be with you*, the font makes personal: called by name, claimed as his, brought through the water into freedom.

LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Find out the date of your baptism this week, ask your parents, call the parish, and once you have it, read Isaiah 43:1-4 aloud with your own name in it, on principle, every year on that date, starting now.
- Practice the Servant's method once deliberately: choose the most bruised person in your week and refuse, for one whole conversation, to fix, correct, or advise. Just do not break the reed. Watch what happens.
- Pray the Philippians hymn (2:5-11) slowly once this week, kneeling at verse 10, because the text says knees, and yours is one of them.

SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine."

Isaiah 43:1 (RSV2CE)

Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 49:1-7 and 50:4-9, closely.

Catechism References From This Session

CCC 713-714 • CCC 449 • CCC 2112-2113 • CCC 1220-1221