

# He Was Pierced

Isaiah 51-53

## WHAT WE FOUND

The sealed guesses opened, and then the sleeve came up. We walked the arm's trail, *his arm rules for him* (40:10), Zion praying to the arm that split the sea (51:9), "*The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations*" (52:10), and every line promised spectacle. Then 53:1 asked our sealed question, "*To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*", and showed us a man: no beauty, despised, rejected, a man of sorrows. The arm of the LORD is revealed in a person: omnipotence bared looks like self-gift. Most of our guesses were right; the astonishment is *how*.

The pronouns of 53:4-6 would not let us stay spectators: *our* griefs, *our* transgressions, the chastisement that made *us* whole, and the sentence at the center: "*the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all*." The silent lamb died among the wicked and was buried "*with a rich man*", a case-file detail kept by a council member from Arimathea. And the summit, 53:10: "*when he makes himself an offering for sin*." The Hebrew is '*asham*, the guilt offering of Leviticus 5, the sacrifice of reparation, and the subject of the verb is the Servant himself: no unwilling victim anywhere, a priest self-offering, who after pouring out his soul to death *sees his offspring*, prolongs his days, and *made intercession*, work Hebrews 7:25 shows continuing. Expiation, satisfaction, propitiation, substitution: the Church's vocabulary of atonement, anchored where the Catechism anchors it (CCC 601, 615, both built on this Song), and made present at every Mass, which is one single sacrifice with the cross and, in Trent's words, truly propitiatory (CCC 1367).

We faced the moral objection to the atonement at full strength, that punishing an innocent is monstrous, and answered it from the Song's own grammar: *he makes himself* the offering; the Offerer is God the Son, one in will with the Father, so the Judge is serving the sentence and the offended party is paying the debt; what the Father willed was not pain for its own sake but the love that shone in it (St. Thomas: a superabundant satisfaction, ST III q. 48); and even among humans, forgiving a real wrong always means absorbing its cost yourself. The cross is what *simply forgiving* looks like when God does it. And we found the Ethiopian in Acts 8, reading this exact passage, asking our sealed question in substance, and Philip "*beginning with this scripture*" preaching Jesus. We have spent eleven weeks becoming Philip; someone we know is in the chariot.

## VOICES OF THE CHURCH

**St. Clement of Rome** • *Letter to the Corinthians* (1 Clement 16)

Writing from Rome in the first generation after the apostles, Clement (1 Clement 16) holds up the humility of Christ and proves it by quoting Isaiah 53 at length as the Lord's own portrait. The New Testament had already read the Servant of Christ, and here the identification stands in one of the earliest surviving Christian writings outside it.

**St. Anselm of Canterbury** • *Why God Became Man*

The debt of sin is owed by man and exceeds what any creature can pay; only one who is man can offer it, and only one who is God can afford it. The Servant who makes himself an offering, owing nothing and paying everything, is the answer walking.

**St. Thomas Aquinas** • *Summa Theologiae III, q. 48*

Christ's Passion was a superabundant satisfaction: the love and obedience with which he suffered were greater than all the malice of all sin. The Passion saves not because suffering is precious but because such love is.

## LIVE IT THIS WEEK

- Attend one Mass with Isaiah 53:10-12 in your pocket, and at the elevation, pray the verse where it lives: *he makes himself an offering for sin... he made intercession for the transgressors.*
- Go to Confession and bring the pronouns with you: name what he was wounded for. Leave healed: his stripes, our healing, is the exchange the chapter publishes.
- Read the fourth Song aloud once, alone, replacing *our* and *we* with *my* and *I*.

### SCRIPTURE MEMORY VERSE

*"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed."*

**Isaiah 53:5 (RSV2CE)**

### Before Next Session

Read Isaiah 54:1-10 and 55:1-3.

### Catechism References From This Session

CCC 601 • CCC 615 • CCC 608 • CCC 1367