

**Palm Sunday**  
**April 16 and 17, 2011**

Isaiah 50:4-9a “God Is on Your Side”

When life is difficult or tough for people, they might sometimes wonder where God is or whether God cares or is on their side at all. We might also wonder if Jesus ever felt like that when the persecution against him was becoming more intense as he approached Palm Sunday. It was not that God did not love Jesus. After all, it was just a few weeks ago we had the reading from John 3:16 which states that Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, and just a season ago in Epiphany we had readings where God called Jesus his dearly beloved Son. However, as we enter Holy Week today, it might seem that God had abandoned or turned his back on Jesus. Our text today, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Messianic Servant Song from Isaiah, assures us that God has not abandoned his Son. In fact, as the song makes clear, God is always on Jesus’ side, and therefore Jesus can face confidently what is ahead for him as he begins the last week of his life in this world because he knows that there is no shame in the cross.

What gave Jesus such great confidence? First, God gave Jesus the words he needed to hear every day. Listen again to the first verses of our text:

*<sup>4</sup>The Lord GOD has given me  
the tongue of those who are taught,  
that I may know how to sustain with a word  
him who is weary.  
Morning by morning he awakens;  
he awakens my ear  
to hear as those who are taught.*

Jesus spent time daily meditating on God’s Word and in prayer. In John 1, we learn that Jesus came into the world to explain to us who God really is because we cannot really know who God is unless God teaches us about himself. Our sins prevent us from knowing who God is and having a good relationship with God.

Jesus, on the other hand, came into the world without sin when he was miraculously conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of his mother, Mary. As Jesus grew up, he learned about his special relationship with God, about his special work of salvation for the world that would lead him to the cross, and about the glory that God would receive from his special work. As God equipped and taught his Son, Jesus proclaimed God’s word to those who came to hear him speak. Jesus only taught what he heard from the Father. Later, God would send the Holy Spirit to speak that same word to us.

God’s Word encouraged and strengthened Jesus for the work he came into the world to accomplish for our salvation and forgiveness. The Word that encouraged Jesus encourages us when we become weary or burdened in this life by events or circumstances that may seem out of our control. At such times, our time with God’s Word reminds us that God is on our side and will bring us even through difficult circumstances along life’s way.

Jesus looked forward to time he spent with God in meditation and in prayer. But part of God’s revelation to his Son was also the suffering and persecution he would face, and Isaiah writes about this 600 years before Jesus’ birth:

*<sup>5</sup> The Lord GOD has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious; I turned not backward.*

*<sup>6</sup> I gave my back to those who strike, and my cheeks to those who pull out the beard;  
I hid not my face from disgrace and spitting.*

Most people would run the opposite direction if they knew they were walking into danger. It's why we know we must avoid dark alleys, stay on the path rather than wander into the woods, or why we get nervous when suddenly we have driven off our course and into unfamiliar neighborhoods. We would choose to go the opposite direction – that is, to safety. However, Jesus did not turn away from the suffering that stood in his future and that would lead him to the cross. It was his Heavenly Father's will that Jesus face persecution, suffering, and death for the world. Jesus was obedient to the Father, and he stayed the course to the cross for our sins and salvation. Jesus accepted persecution. He refused to renounce God in order to avoid persecution.

So Jesus, the second person of the Holy Trinity who took on our humanity, listened carefully and learned from God's Word, and furthermore he was obedient to the Father even when he knew the cross was ahead for him. He also knew one more thing. God was on his side.

*<sup>7</sup> But the Lord GOD helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced;  
therefore I have set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame.*

*<sup>8</sup> He who vindicates me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together.  
Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me.*

*<sup>9</sup> Behold, the Lord GOD helps me; who will declare me guilty?*

He knew that God was on his side, and that he did not take that road of suffering alone. God had Jesus' back. He had everything all planned out. Jesus would suffer. Jesus would die. And Jesus would be guilty – guilty with our sins as our substitute. However, this is the very thing that made Jesus obedient. He came into the world to take our sins on himself so that we can be reconciled to God, have forgiveness of sins, and be empowered to live a new life that gives honor and glory to God in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ. God strengthened Jesus for this special work for our salvation.

Just as God helped Christ when he faithfully obeyed God's will, so we can be sure that God will help us, because we are dearly loved by God. God is on our side. It is just like St. Paul's writes, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength."

Today is a day of joy for the people of God. The Messiah has come for us on Palm Sunday. He has been carefully taught by God the words to speak to help us see and know God as our Father, and he is prepared to see his mission through, in obedience to God's will, all the way to the cross. God is on his side and will help him to gain the victory over sin and death. Because of God's great love which has acted for us in the person and work of Jesus Christ, our Messiah, we can be certain that God will always be on our side, even when we think or feel we are all alone.

*solī deo gloria*