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Fifth Sunday of Lent Year A (March 29, 2026)

Let's spend Lent together with baptismal candidates.

chief priest Father Hiroshi Konishi

First Reading: Isaiah 50:4 - 7

Second Reading: Letter to the Philippians 2:6 - 11

Gospel Reading: The Gospel According to Matthew 27:11 - 54

Please focus on the First Reading.

The Book of Isaiah contains four poems known as the "Songs of the Servant of the Lord." All of these are recorded in Isaiah, beginning with Chapter 40. Since the Book of Isaiah was compiled over a long period of time, it is divided into three sections, referred to as First Isaiah, Second Isaiah, and Third Isaiah. The "Songs of the Servant of the Lord" are found in the section known as Second Isaiah. These passages proclaim joy following the Babylonian Exile.

The First Song of the Servant of the Lord (Chapter 42:1 - 4): The Servant described here is a gentle Savior who "will not cry out or raise his voice... will not break a bruised reed or quench a smoldering wick." This stands in contrast to another Servant who appears immediately before him, who "will trample the rulers like clay underfoot, as a potter tramples clay." This Servant of the Lord is the One who "brings forth righteous judgment" (Chapter 42:1).

The Second Song of the Servant of the Lord (Chapter 49:1 - 9): The Servant's mission here is to speak God's word. As the "mouth" that proclaims God's will, he speaks God's word with the intensity of a "sharp sword." In this way, he brings Israel back to God. He "raises up the tribes of Jacob and brings back the remnant of Israel." Therefore, this Servant of the Lord is "a light to the nations and brings my salvation to the ends of the earth."

The Third Song of the Servant of the Lord (Chapter 50:4 - 11): This section includes today's first reading. This Servant of the Lord may refer to the many prophets who appeared in Israel. The prophets were persecuted and afflicted by both rulers and the people. In the same way, the Servant of the Lord must lead a life of endurance and suffering.

The Fourth Song of the Servant of the Lord (Chapters 52:13 - 53:12): In this Servant of the Lord, the meaning of the Servant's suffering is revealed. "He was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities" (Chapter 53, verse 5). He suffered as a substitute for the sins of humanity. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all."

The Servant of the Lord is gentle, speaks God's word, is persecuted by people, and bears suffering for their sins.

By the way, why did the Servant of the Lord endure persecution? Let's refer to the commentary by Father Amemiya of the Tokyo Diocese. If we read today's reading carefully, the relationship between the Servant of the Lord and God becomes clear. A literal translation of verses 4 through the first half of verse 5 is as follows:

The Lord God has given me the tongue of a disciple

to know how to sustain the weary

He awakens my ears

In the morning, in the morning

He awakens my ears

so that I may listen and obey as His disciple

The Lord God has opened my ears

This servant renewed his relationship with God every morning. With open ears, he listened to God's words, and with the tongue given to him, he helped the weary.

The second half of verse 5 states, "I did not resist or turn away." Regarding his relationship with God, which was renewed every morning, he "did not resist"; regarding the persecution described in verse 6 and beyond, he "did not turn away."

It was precisely because he had a relationship with God that was renewed every morning that this servant of the Lord was able to gain endurance.