

## **“SERVANT SONGS” – Isaiah 52:13-53:12**

### **An Unlikely Champion (52:13-53:3)**

The fourth and longest Servant Song is used as the First Reading at the Good Friday Commemoration of Christ’s Passion each year. It speaks powerfully not only of the suffering of God’s Servant, but also the benefits to us of that suffering and the final victory. The song presents three sections to be considered: the Servant as unlikely champion; the Servant’s vicarious suffering; and the Servant’s ultimate victory.

Although the New American Bible (NAB) translation is the one currently used at our Good Friday service, the Revised Edition (NABRE) translation is used here. Reflecting recent biblical research, it more clearly presents the meaning of the text.

The first part of the song begins with the Lord proclaiming the unexpected exaltation of his servant. This victory is a real “didn’t see that coming” moment: nations are taken aback and even rulers – not usually at a loss for words – are speechless. The Lord’s servant was not one of the “beautiful people,” nor a type-cast hero like Charlton Heston or Sylvester Stallone. On the contrary, he just “didn’t look the part.” His exaltation is therefore all the more noteworthy:

- <sup>13</sup> *See, my servant shall prosper,  
he shall be raised high and greatly exalted.*
- <sup>14</sup> *Even as many were amazed at him —  
so marred were his features, beyond that of mortals  
his appearance, beyond that of human beings —*
- <sup>15</sup> *So shall he startle many nations,  
kings shall stand speechless;  
For those who have not been told shall see,  
those who have not heard shall ponder it.*

As Chapter 53 begins, the speaker changes from the Lord to unnamed people, who concur that there was nothing about the servant that attracted them to him:

- <sup>1</sup> *Who would believe what we have heard?  
To whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?*
- <sup>2</sup> *He grew up like a sapling before him,  
like a shoot from the parched earth;  
He had no majestic bearing to catch our eye,  
no beauty to draw us to him.*

In fact, the servant wasn’t just lacking in attractiveness – he was actively avoided. Since suffering was usually considered to be God’s punishment for wrongdoing, a person who suffered was thought to be sinful and, therefore, looked down upon:

- <sup>3</sup> *He was spurned and avoided by men,  
a man of suffering, knowing pain,  
Like one from whom you turn your face,  
spurned, and we held him in no esteem.*