

## The Bible Speaks

by Jeffrey Frantz

*Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases;  
yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted.  
But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities.  
Upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises  
we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to  
our own way, And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Isaiah 53:4-6

*Then Jesus said, **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.***

Luke 23:34

**Lent and the vision of the suffering servant.** As we move into Lent now, on the way to *holy week*, with Easter on the horizon, it is a time for reflection. As is always the case in Lent, images of sacrifice fill our memory and imagination. The fact of Jesus' suffering and death must, at some point, draw us in.

All the time in or church, we talk about the *suffering/ sacrificial love* of Jesus. The depths and meanings of this love define for us who Jesus was ... as well as who he is for us moderns some two millennia later.

To some extent, the gospel writers, in reflecting on the meaning of Jesus' death, looked back into the Hebrew Scriptures. The verses from Isaiah 53, above, no doubt gave them pause for reflection and interpretation.

Isaiah 53 is itself one of the four Servant Songs of the prophet known as *Second Isaiah* (Isaiah 40-55). These *servant songs* rose up during the time of Babylonian Exile, when Israel, defeated in every imaginable way, was desperate for a new vision and the dawning of a new day.

In the *servant songs*, most scholars agree, Israel is the *servant*. And through her suffering, a new vision of who she is, of her role among the nations, is given birth. Having suffered and having learned great humility in the process, Israel becomes a *light to the nations*.

A flame of universalism is ignited in her spirit. God's vision for the world is not to be reduced to all the tribalisms that, every day, do battle for power. God's vision is a BIG PICTURE vision, where every nation gives up something so that all the nations might be one.

**The best of Christianity**, and therein the best of Jesus, is uncovered in our sobering reflections on the cross of Jesus. For it is there that we begin to see the light of God's salvation, rising up from the ashes of unbridled hubris and self-centeredness. It is there that repentance comes and, along with repentance, hope for a new tomorrow.

Always, in our faith, we're challenged to *let go* of things and to allow God's forgiveness to overflow in our spirit. Forgiveness is the highest form of love. Bursting with God's saving grace, it opens the door to the hope we all have for new beginnings and new tomorrows.

The *suffering servant* invites all people in. And in the process, it invites us all to give up something (whatever we need to give up) in order to find common ground with our sisters and brothers along the way.

The hope of the future is always linked to the challenge to each one of us to see the BIG PICTURE of our lives and of the world and to understand ourselves in light of this relational context. At the end of the day—always—we're all in this boat called life together.

With all of the global challenges before us—challenges in war, challenges with the economy, challenges with the environment and over-population, challenges with disease control and on and on, it is only when we all see our lives as inter-connected that the glaring inequities of the planet will be overcome and that all persons everywhere will live lives of dignity and promise.

To this end let our faithful witness be directed.