

as the one who accomplishes that history, and as associating his Church with him in his resurrection. Participation in the Easter vigil enables us to see what the saving plan of God is, how it was accomplished, and how we share in it. Here the will of God and the instrument used by God, the mysteries of Christ and his Church, are seen in their unity: the risen Christ is this unity. Not without reason is Easter called the 'heart of the liturgy' and the solemnity of solemnities.



THE SERVANT VOCATION

SISTER M. GERARD, S.C.M.M.

IN sacred scripture, to be God's servant is to be God's friend. The servant is someone especially chosen, especially loved. God *prefers* him to others. He is 'my servant'. There is a wonderful sense of intimacy and belonging in that possessive 'my'. God chooses his servants with a spontaneity and freedom which we see reflected in our own choice of friends. And to be chosen is to belong. We are no longer our own. We are committed to another. The choice is not only one of love but of demand. To be a friend is to be someone of whom a great deal may be asked. God's servant is always someone from whom God feels free to ask for more, much more, than other men.

Sacred scripture bears constant, unswerving witness to this fact. Intimacy with Yahweh means demands by Yahweh. If he chooses someone to be his servant it will inevitably follow that he will have something to ask of them, a task, a mission, an assignment. Indeed, the closer the friendship, the more difficult the task. Abraham certainly knew what it 'cost' to be God's friend as he made his way up the mountain, Isaac by his side. So did 'a servant of mine called Job', sitting like refuse on the dung-hill. Did not Moses and all the prophets after him try to beg off from Yahweh's choice of them, sensing even in the beginnings of their

servant vocation what great demands would be made on them? 'Ah, who am I, that thou shouldst send me . . .' (Exod. iii, 11).

But choose his servants God will. He has a plan for the world. And just as long as that plan continues to unfold in sacred history, so will the 'Lord of History' (to borrow Fr Daniélou's term) continue to pick his men to help him carry it out. Now, as then, the servant vocation is a continuing one. There is still the special choice, the special love, the special demand. St Paul knew this when he called himself and his fellow apostles 'your *servants* in Christ Jesus'. Yahweh's servants are now Christ's servants, his chosen and trusted friends to whom he assigns no small task: he asks them to continue in their own lives his mystery of redemption. The servant's present mission is nothing less than the salvation of the nations.

But the Church's apostles and missionaries, who continue the servant tradition in the apostolic vocation today, are not initiators but followers. The pattern of their vocation has already been outlined for them in sacred scripture. God himself has drawn the sketches. Their task is to know the pattern well in order to live it to its fullest potentialities. Apostles are in a very real sense the heirs of a most ancient tradition, the servant tradition. They must know then what that tradition expects of them, what it will mean in the living out of their apostolic vocation, what in short being a 'servant of God' demands in the concrete circumstances of the apostolate.

The pattern of the servant vocation, although outlined in the lives of all God's servants throughout the course of sacred history, reaches a certain high-point, the peak of servant theology in what are known as the 'Servant Poems' in the prophecy of Isaias. Here in four brief poems¹ inserted toward the end of the prophecy, we meet that mysterious figure, 'the servant of Yahweh'. Here is the pattern *par excellence*. Here is the servant among servants, the one whose election and vocation are model and type for all who are called to be God's specially chosen friends, to be God's specially chosen instruments. Indeed, so real and perceptible is the presence of this servant, so clear the features of both his life and his work, one feels the pattern to be a present, living person rather than someone who has been or is expected to be. This servant is some-

1 First Poem: Isaias xlii: 1-9.

Second Poem: Isaias xlix: 1-9a.

Third Poem: Isaias l: 4-9a.

Fourth Poem: Isaias lii: 13, Chapter liii.

one who is—‘Here is my servant’—someone whose living of the servant vocation is in the ever-present now of sacred history, both as fulfilment of the servant tradition in the past and as type and perfection of its realization in the present economy of the Church. This servant speaks, here and now, to all those who have been singled out by the same God for the same vocation, speaks both by his words and by his actions, and above all, by his sufferings, to those whose special friendship with God makes them continue the servant’s mission in the world.

What then does he say?

The man of my choice

God himself introduces us to his servant. It is for the chooser, not the chosen, to speak first:

And now, here is my servant, to whom I grant protection, the man of my choice, greatly beloved (xlii, 1).

The man of my choice: choice, then, is at the beginning of things. ‘Blessed is the man whom God chooses . . .’ (Ps. lxiv, 4). It is fruitless to try to figure out the ‘why’ of God’s choices. Election is a mystery. There are only two things we may presume to say about it: the choosing is not a question of merit but of mercy; it is the result of the absolute sovereignty of God’s selection. We can say this because God himself has said it: ‘I will show pity, on those whom I pity; I will show mercy where I am merciful’ (Exod. xxxiii, 19). This is the answer. There can be no more questioning. When God chooses someone to be his servant, his greatly beloved, there can be only one reply: acquiescence. Like Thérèse of Lisieux, our best response is a song: ‘The mercies of the Lord I will sing forever . . .’ (Ps. lxxxviii, 1).

These mercies begin early:

Ere ever I was born, the Lord sent me his summons, kept me in mind already, when I lay in my mother’s womb (xlix, 1).

It is the servant who speaks now. Once he is aware of the choice, he is also convinced of the protection which accompanies it. ‘From my mother’s womb, thou art my God’ (Ps. xxi, 10). The servant’s vocation begins in the timeless mind of God. Everything is preparation and providence. He is someone ‘kept in mind’ even long before he is born. He is an ‘arrow . . . chosen out carefully, hidden yet in his quiver’ (xlix, 2). When all is readiness, the will be picked out. Not a moment before. A special choice arrow

demands a special protection. This is the one 'to whom I grant protection'. Nothing must go amiss in the plans God has for his servant.

This conviction of both God's choice and God's protection must be the very ground of the servant vocation. Both feet must be solid on this ground. Otherwise the house will shake and topple when God assigns his servant his special task. Right at the centre of the call must be this overwhelming conviction that despite one's own lacks and weaknesses, one has been hand-picked from the quiver. The servant is a person summoned to a particular destiny. He does not, indeed he could not, choose it for himself. 'The Lord sent me his summons. . . .' It is the Lord then who must see to it. It is the Lord who must bring to completion what he has begun.

Only in such faith may the servant say with confidence:

Not mine to shrink from the task (l, 5).

The natural, human reaction is quite different: 'Alas, alas, Lord God (said I), I am but a child that has never learned to speak' (Jer. i, 6). The first reaction is always the Jeremias-reaction. And the shrinking continues in constant hiding in the lives of God's servants, especially as the proportions of the task begin to unfold with a terrible clarity. It is precisely then, at each temptation to withdrawal, at each new shrinking from the demands of the assignment, that the over-riding conviction of being chosen must be there. 'Nay, I have a mission for thee to undertake. . . . Have no human fears; am I not at thy side, to protect thee from harm?' (Jer. i, 7-8). This is the rock-bottom faith of the servant vocation. It is indeed like that rock of which T. S. Eliot speaks in his poem, *The Dry Salvages*: the clouds and rough seas of doubts and difficulties may often conceal it, but when faith and confidence return to clear the atmosphere, 'it is what it always was': 'Here is my servant . . . the man of my choice, greatly beloved'.

Right order among the gentiles

Mission always follows election. No sooner has Yahweh chosen his servant than he anoints him for his task:

My spirit rests upon him, and he will proclaim right order among the gentiles (xlii, 1).

The servant is one on whom God's spirit rests and who in turn rests in God's spirit. The choice is also the gift. Indeed, in the

choosing is the giving: to be chosen is to be loved, is to be gifted, all at once. If God chooses it is because he loves, and if he loves, his spirit already rests in the beloved one, his gift of intimacy, of 'withness'. '*Tu mecum es.*' The servant is the man who truly walks in the spirit, held and upheld by his power. Like Christ himself, he is led by the spirit even into the desert, symbol of the struggle which awaits all God's servants when they begin the assignment entrusted to them.

But struggle is for sanctity. And sanctity is ultimately the servant's mission. 'He will proclaim right order among the gentiles.' His proclamation is virtue, justice, the right order of holiness; *justitia non potestas*, according to the phrase of St Thomas. The servant's task is to establish right order in the world, not by power but by righteousness, by his own just life. His own justice must indeed abound, must proclaim unmistakably to the world the unique mission which is his: to bring to all men the right order of the holy life.

The holy life; this is the fruit of the servant vocation. It grows and ripens to maturity in the good ground which the Lord himself has selected. 'How it breathes about this son of mine, the fragrance of earth when the Lord's blessing is on it!' (Gen. xxvii, 27). It is that *odor suavitatis*, that sweet smell of the life of virtue by which God's servant is to attract the gentile nations to right order, to holiness. 'In the streets I gave a sweet smell . . .' (Ecclus. xxiv, 20) and therefore do the nations reply: 'We will run after thee in the odour of thy ointments' (Cant. i, 3). The servant's earth, blessed so abundantly by the Lord, yields that fragrant fruit—the holy life—in order to tempt men back to God just as they had once been tempted away from him by the forbidden fruit of the tree.

To bring forth such fruit, however, the servant must be someone in whom God's word has taken root. 'And some seed fell on good ground . . .' (Mark iv, 8). God sows his word in his servant's heart so that he may proclaim it to other men, not so much by *saying* it as by *doing* it. For God's word does what it says: 'Let there be . . .' and there is. 'Be it done . . . according to thy word.' The servant announces God's word by doing God's actions, by himself becoming a living word, bearing witness in his right deeds to those wise words of God, hidden in his heart. 'For thou teachest me wisdom in the depths of my heart' (Ps. l, 6). This is how he

proclaims right order to the gentiles: modelling his life on that pattern of wisdom which orders all things both with gentleness and power (Wisd. viii, 1).

So the servant's mission is to be accomplished by the gentle and persuasive power of God's word.

Not with sternness, not with violence; to set up right order on earth, that is his mission (xlii, 4).

And yet with a power, with a weapon that men will not be able to resist:

Word of mine is sword of his, ready sharpened under cover of his hand (xlix, 2).

God's word is the sword by which the servant conquers. God's word, living and fruitful in the servant's own hard-earned life of virtue, is the power which will heal and restore the wounds which evil's disorder inflicts upon the world. The right order he is to restore will be salvation in its total sense: the healing of both body and spirit, the saving of the whole man:

I, the Lord, have summoned thee, taking thee by the hand and protecting thee, to make, through thee, a covenant with my own people, to shed, through thee, light over the Gentiles: to give sight to blinded eyes, to set the prisoner free from his captivity, from the dungeon where he lies in darkness (xlii, 6-7).

The servant himself is to be God's covenant with his people, his living promise of light and freedom. He is the sign God will set before men, the sign which points to that love faithful to its promises, working wonders of physical and spiritual restoration through his own chosen instruments.

It is God's servant, then, who must keep God's promises. His good works must so shine before men that through them God may shed his light over the gentiles. Through thee . . ., God tells his servant, must that healing light come. You are not the light but must bear witness to it. The light which in the beginning was created by the Word, must now continue to shine through the virtuous life of the servant of the Word. For it is still God's word which is 'the light shining in the darkness', shining now in the good works of his servant, healing through him blinded eyes and blinded spirits, freeing through him those whom sin and ignorance keep fettered in the dungeon's darkness:

Use thee I will, he promises . . . nay, I have appointed thee to

be the light of the Gentiles, in thee I will send out my salvation to the furthest corners of the earth (xliv, 6).

Many shall he claim

The success of the servant's mission is assured:

The Just One, my servant; many shall he claim for his own, win their acquittal, on his shoulders bearing their guilt (liii, 11). The keynote struck is confidence. The servant undertakes, continues, and completes his mission with confidence. And he may have this absolute trust, not only because he is especially chosen, especially protected, especially loved, but most important of all, because he is the instrument of the divine purpose. There is no thwarting that purpose, no changing that plan. If the servant's mission is God's mission, then it must succeed: 'many shall he claim for his own'.

But this winning is to be at the cost of a terrible losing; and here we touch upon the mystery which is at the heart of the servant vocation. To win others, one must lose oneself. The servant must be despised and rejected if God's plan is to be known and accepted. That is the pattern:

Nay, here is one despised, left out of all human reckoning; bowed with misery, and no stranger to weakness; how should we recognize that face? How should we take any account of him, a man so despised? (liii, 3).

Yet this is he that will purify a multitude of nations; kings shall stand dumb in his presence; seen, now, where men had no tidings of him, made known to such as never heard his name (lii, 15).

In God's mysterious design for the salvation of the nations, it is precisely through the misery, the weakness, and the ultimate rejection of his servants that the multitude of peoples are to come to the knowledge of his truth, are to enter into the kingdom of his light. The servant's success is to be in his failure, or rather it is God himself who crowns the despised one with final victory.

How strange this pattern is, how unlike what we would have suspected! God's specially chosen are to be his specially chastised: 'on his shoulders bearing their guilt'. All the chastisements owing to the guilty and rebellious children are to be borne by the faithful son. It is his back which is to feel the Father's chastising rod, his loyalty which is to restore peace again to the disloyal. The pro-

tection God promises his servant is certainly not a protection from hardship, from pain. The reverse would seem to be true. The most dearly loved is to be the most sorely wounded:

. . . and all the while it was for our sins he was wounded, it was guilt of ours crushed him down; on him the punishment fell that brought us peace, by his bruises we were healed (liii, 5). Again, we are face to face with mystery. Like election itself, the mystery of the innocent one's suffering on behalf of the guilty is God's secret. The servant does not pry, he accepts.

In accepting his vocation, the servant does so realistically, eyes open to the harsh outlines of the pattern. He expects to bear the brunt of things. Suffering, of whatever kind, cannot take him by surprise. It is part, indeed the chief part, of the whole plan:

Ay, the Lord's will it was, overwhelmed he should be with trouble (liii, 10).

We remember that God's servants are God's friends, friends of whom he may ask a great deal. Sometimes this asking goes very far and very deep. Sometimes the servant must also be the victim. His friendship lays him open to this total gift, to this complete holocaust. His being chosen does not mean his being spared, but rather his being offered. Neither does his goodness, his virtue exempt him; it is precisely the material of the sacrifice: *hostiam puram, hostiam sanctam, hostiam immaculatam*. The more holy and spotless the life, the more pleasing and acceptable the sacrifice.

This brings us to the final stage of the servant vocation. The sacrifice asked of God's servants which reaches to the deepest level of suffering, to the most exacting oblation, is the sacrifice of rejection. The people to whom the servant is sent reject him. They will not accept the offering. There are, of course, degrees here. Rejection may range anywhere from misunderstanding to the malice which brings death. But the servant is to taste, according to God's measuring, something of that bitter cup which *the* 'servant of Yahweh' drained to the dregs:

I offered my body defenceless to the men who would smite me, my cheeks to all who plucked at my beard; I did not turn away my face when they reviled me and spat upon me! (I, 6). Nothing seems hard or difficult as long as one can still hear the applause. But to continue to love and to do, in spite of the reviling and the spitting, this is what God asks of his servants. This

is the sacrifice most pleasing to him. This is the trying by fire which burns and consumes until one is totally given.

Rejection, however, is not the final word:

His life laid down for guilt's atoning, he shall yet be rewarded; father of a long posterity, instrument of the divine purpose; for all his heart's anguish, rewarded in full (liii, 10-11).

Because the pattern of the servant vocation is sacrificial, it is also life-giving. 'Unless the seed falling to the ground die . . . , (John xii, 24). There must be this dying in the life of God's servant. He is God's seed, ready to be cast wherever the sower will, ready to die that others may live. All the troubles, difficulties and burdens he is asked to assume are part of the daily death of his vocation, part of that death-bearing which St Paul assures us is necessary if life is to be manifest in us (2 Cor. iv, 10).

And so, death is for life. All the anguish is to be rewarded in full. Indeed, so convinced is God's servant of the present as well as ultimate fruitfulness of his heart's sufferings that he already experiences joy *in* the pain itself, knowing that it is the necessary token of the life-giving. Even more than the woman who forgets her pain for joy that a man is born into the world (John xvi, 21), he finds joy at the very centre of his anguish, intermingled with it, springing from it. He is happy to be accounted worthy to suffer something for the Lord who chose him. If suffering is the servant's portion, it is also his inheritance, his goodly place where he finds the hidden springs of that abundant life which comes only from the cross. For the cross *is* the servant's vocation: mystery of the mingling of death and life, joy and pain, rejection and exaltation. Here, in the anguished heart of *the* suffering servant, do God's chosen ones find full reward.

This, then, is the pattern: I choose, I protect, I chastise, I reward. 'How good is God to Israel . . .', to his chosen servants. Not only does he show them the way, he treads it himself.

And now, here is my servant, to whom I grant protection, the man of my choice, greatly beloved (xlii, 1).

'Here is my Son in whom I am well pleased . . .' (Matt. iii, 17). The Son is the servant. He lives the pattern himself in order that we may follow, not only a plan, but a person. God himself becomes the chosen one, the just one, the rejected one. And he tells us that the servant is not to have a different lot from the master (Matt. x, 24), from the master who came to minister to

others, to become the servant of others. To follow his way is to live the pattern. The directions are very clear. There need be no doubt, no hesitating. God's servants need only the love and the courage to follow the pattern, to follow after all those holy and just servants of God who have gone before them, full of hope and confidence in God's holy word:

The world sees nothing but the pains they endure; they themselves have eyes only for what is immortal; so light their suffering, so great the gain they win! God, all the while, did but test them, and testing them found them worthy of him. His gold, tried in the crucible, his burnt-sacrifice, graciously accepted, they do but wait for the time of their deliverance; then they will shine out, these just souls, unconquerable as the sparks that break out, now here, now there, among the stubble. Theirs to sit in judgment on nations, to subdue whole peoples, under a LORD whose reign shall last forever. Trust him if thou wilt, true thou shalt find him; faith waits for him calmly and lovingly; who claims his gift, who shall attain peace, if not they, *his chosen servants?* (Wisd. iii, 4-9).



REDEMPTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

ROLAND POTTER, O.P.

THE gospels and the new testament generally tell of 'good tidings of great joy': but so does the old testament in its own way, for we can read it as a long-drawn preparation for the gospel, and text after text speaks of God's joyous plan. It is perhaps in this aspect of the scriptures that we best realize the fundamental unity of old testament and new. This unity is well illustrated when we, as we should, explain the term 'gospel' by citing texts of Isaias, e.g.:

Get thee up upon a high mountain,
thou that bringest good tidings to Sion;
lift up thy voice with strength,