

You will notice that Isaiah (like all the prophets) does not really mind whom he offends. So at 1:10 we read:



Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom;  
pay attention to the Law of the Lord, you people of Gomorrah.

It is hard to imagine the religious establishment in Judah not being offended by this mode of address. Or you might like to contrast Isaiah's song of the vineyard (representing the infidelity of Israel) at 5:1-7 with the story of his encounter with the Lord (6:1-13). Then reflect on what he says to King Ahaz (7:1-17), as an excellent example of religion involving itself in politics. Or think of the prophet's vision of the new world that will come with the Messiah, the son of David (11:1-9).

### SONGS OF THE SERVANT

Then read slowly through the rest of the prophet's text; and notice the change of tone when you get to chapter 40. You will find many familiar passages where Jews and Christians have felt that God was speaking to them, especially perhaps in the four "Songs of the Suffering Servant", which Christians readily applied to Jesus (you will find them in chapters 42, 49, 50 and 52-53). Then go slowly through "Third Isaiah" (56-66); and, as you read, ask what it is that God is saying to us today through the Isaiah scroll. For a modern equivalent, have you thought of those prophets whom God has been sending us for decades now, to warn us of the damage we are doing to our planet? We have not always believed them, but now it is hard to deny that they were right.

### Mass text

#### ENTRANCE ANTIPHON

**Turn your ear, O Lord, and answer me;  
save the servant who trusts in you, my God.  
Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I cry to you all  
the day long.**

#### FIRST READING Isaiah 22:19-23

#### PSALM Psalm 137

**RESPONSE Your love, O Lord, is eternal,  
discard not the work of your hands.**

1. I thank you, Lord, with all my heart,  
you have heard the words of my mouth.  
Before the angels I will bless you.  
I will adore before your holy temple. **R.**
2. I thank you for your faithfulness and love  
which excel all we ever knew of you.  
On the day I called, you answered;  
you increased the strength of my soul. **R.**
3. The Lord is high yet he looks on the lowly  
and the haughty he knows from afar.  
Your love, O Lord, is eternal,  
discard not the work of your hands. **R.**

#### SECOND READING Romans 11:33-36

#### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

**Alleluia, alleluia!  
You are Peter  
and on this rock I will build my Church.  
And the gates of the underworld can never  
hold out against it.  
Alleluia!**

#### GOSPEL Matthew 16:13-20

#### COMMUNION ANTIPHON

**The earth is replete with the fruits of your  
work, O Lord;  
you bring forth bread from the earth  
and wine to cheer the heart.**

#### Next Sunday's Readings:

Jeremiah 20:7-9  
Romans 12:1-2  
Matthew 16:21-27

FSC  
logo

www.rpbooks.co.uk rp@rpbooks.co.uk @redemptorist

## WHAT DO PROPHETS DO?

Prophets are extraordinary phenomena and not at all comfortable. The central fact about them is that they have had powerful and undeniable experiences of the presence of God, which drives them to speak (and the word "prophet" means not someone who foretells or predicts, but one who utters what God wants them to say), regardless of the feelings of those who are listening; and there will always be a tension between them and those who wield religious authority.

We have not space here to talk about all four of the major prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel) and the twelve minor prophets, not to mention the others who are mentioned in the historical narratives (read up on Elijah and Elisha in the books of Kings, and especially the extraordinary story of Micaiah ben Imlah in 1 Kings 22).

Instead it seems sufficient for our purpose to say something here about Isaiah ben Amoz, the prophet who is most often quoted in our New Testament; and he was the only one of whom a complete scroll was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. He received his vocation in the Temple (look at Isaiah 6), in a powerful experience that he never forgot. Now it must be said that almost certainly the eighth-century prophet did not write all sixty-six chapters ascribed to him, but (roughly) only the first thirty-nine chapters; then there are chapters 40-55, often called "Second Isaiah", which is possibly the product of a school of his disciples in exile in fifth-century Babylon; finally, and with perhaps rather less certainty, there are chapters 55-66, probably written when those exiles had finally, and just a bit reluctantly, been persuaded by the prophet to come back to Jerusalem (and found it not quite what they had imagined).

The basic message is that God is in charge; and it is perhaps important to read the text as a single scroll, and recognise that there are common elements that unite the whole book. Listen out for the beauty of the language and allow it to speak to you. You will see that there are many different kinds of material: autobiography, psalms, hymns, theological discussions, prophetic oracles and parables. In this respect this book is like many of the biblical books. Try to see the differences between the kinds of material.

## How to read the Bible



Fr Nicholas King SJ  
considers the Old  
Testament prophets  
and what they have to  
say to us today.



23 AUGUST 2020

21ST SUNDAY  
IN ORDINARY TIME

YEAR A

DIVINE OFFICE WEEK I