



The hymns we sing characterize our joy and faith at being together as God's family for Mass. They also often reflect the Liturgy of the day and its themes. This Sunday, *Oh, the word of my Lord, deep within my being* will feature in all our Masses and also *The Servant King* may feature. Damian Lundy, the De La Salle brother wrote *Oh, the word of my Lord* and titled it a "Song for a young prophet". Lundy took the biblical words of the call of the Prophet who features in the Liturgy's first reading this Sunday and wove together a marriage of words and music in which God speaks to the young Jeremiah in each verse, placing before him a vocation and mission, with the would-be Prophet himself "refraining" after each verse that the word of God has indeed been *planted deep within his being* and has *filled his mind*.

But this Sunday in the scripture we find Jeremiah weary and dejected, and no wonder! Twenty chapters into his narrative we find that in his prophetic ministry he has truly been a *suffering servant* for the Lord who called him all those years ago in his youth. Most of his words have fallen on deaf ears, and he has generally been rejected as if he were a false prophet.

Unusually, we get to know something of the prophet Jeremiah's life because of the biographical details in the book ascribed to him. These have most likely been provided by Baruch the secretary-scribe and friend of Jeremiah. Baruch of course also has his own book in the Old Testament.

Right at the start of the Book of Jeremiah – as is reflected in the "Song for a young Prophet", Yahweh declares that Jeremiah was called *from the womb* to be God's servant and spokesperson. But almost from the start his ministry was undermined. An early oracle of his was that the temple would be destroyed unless the people repented and this caused him to be arrested and almost executed.

And this wasn't the only time he had to endure beating and imprisonment.

At the end of his tether, he cries out in the scripture today, "You have seduced me Lord, and I have let myself be seduced".

But he knows in his depths that God's interests have to served, and Jeremiah made a sacrifice of himself. He faith compelled him to serve, even when he complained to God. Perhaps the words he heard from the Lord when was called never really left him:

*And everywhere you are to go
my hand will follow you, you will not be alone;
in all the dangers that you fear
you'll find me very near, your words my own.*
as we sing in the hymn.

Jeremiah was indeed a *suffering servant* type of figure. No wonder that when people talked about who Jesus was, many thought he was *Jeremiah* or *one of the prophets*, for he too is cast in the suffering servant mode, by the Evangelist Matthew. The word of the Lord will also mean for him as it did for Jeremiah "insult and derision all day long", even as he begins to prophesy his forthcoming passion. He will shoulder his cross in the cause of the Kingdom and out of love for the world. But look at Peter, who just a few verses earlier was lauding him as *Anointed One* and *Son of the living God*. Now we hear him saying "Heaven forbid it, Lord"that Jesus could suffer, but with these words he becomes an obstacle to the work of salvation. The "rock" becomes a stumbling block!

But we know Peter will be rehabilitated; he will come to understand slowly but surely the mission of the Messiah and how - as Isaiah says in his fourth Suffering Servant Song that "My servant will prosper, shall be lifted up, exalted, rise to great heights". Jesus, Peter will learn, is that "sapling who grew up among them, a man of sorrows and familiar with suffering". By his sufferings the servant King, Jesus, will justify many, taking their faults on himself. The prophetic song of Isaiah makes for powerful and prayerful reading when taken in conjunction with this Sunday's Gospel.

Why not read it in full? [Isaiah 52:13 – 53:12]

Saint Matthew draws a lesson from this episode for all Christians. To follow Christ involves you in a paradox: suffering is the road to glory; only by some self-emptying can you find your true self; in dying we find true life. The evangelist asserts in the words of Jesus that the paradox will be resolved at the end, when the fulness of God's purposes will be revealed.

Jesus, in inviting those who follow him to take up their cross asks nothing of them that he will not do himself. As we know well, *What does it profit a man....?*