

Advent Reading for Wednesday, December 20, 2017
“His Death was Misunderstood by Most”
(Isaiah 53:3-5)

Isaiah’s graphic description of the Messiah in chapter 53 continues in our reading for today: *“He was despised and forsaken by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely our griefs He Himself bore, and our sorrows He carried; yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed”* (53:3-5).

With Isaiah’s words being so explicit and detailed, it is easy to forget that they are part of a 700 year old prophecy, and not the description of an eyewitness. But Isaiah was enabled by the Holy Spirit to vividly capture the hatred and rejection the Messiah would experience, not only the external cruelties, but the internal grief He experienced over the lack of response from those He came to save. By writing in the first person, Isaiah was identifying with his nation’s aversion to a crucified Messiah, and their sad lack of respect for Him.

Of special note in this passage, however, is how Jesus’ death was completely misunderstood by the majority of the Jewish nation: *“We ourselves esteemed Him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”*. This is the attitude we see in the gospels, especially from the religious leaders. While Pilate found no fault with Jesus, and the Jews sought in vain for credible false witnesses to testify against Him, it was the high priest who formally brought the charge against Him, the charge of blasphemy. That is, Jesus repeatedly claimed to be God in human flesh, and to be the promised Messiah. *“The Jews answered Pilate, ‘We have a law, and by that law He ought to die because He made Himself out to be the Son of God’* (John 17:7). Matthew records how the high priest *“tore his robes and said, ‘He has blasphemed’”* (26:65). The only circumstance under which a high priest could take such drastic action as tearing his robe was when someone blasphemed, and this was the charge against Jesus. As Isaiah said, the Jewish nation as a whole saw Him to be *“stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted”*.

While Jesus often heals in this life, it is in eternity when all sickness will be removed. The Apostle Peter interprets Isaiah's promise for us: *"He Himself bore our sins in His own body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; FOR BY HIS WOUNDS YOU ARE HEALED. For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls"* (I Peter 2:24-25). While we are always encouraged with physical healing, our greatest need is for the spiritual healing provided by our Lord through the cross.

Giving Thanks – Thank You that all You suffered was for us!