

PREGO PLUS: BACKGROUND NOTES

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR B

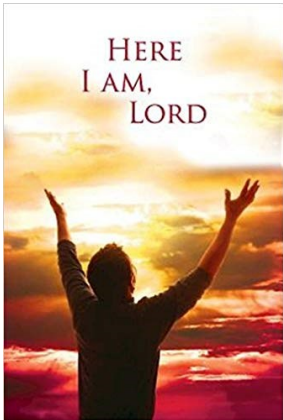
Psalm 39 (40)

Some think that this psalm of thanksgiving may originally have been two texts that were joined together at a later date. Today we read part of the first half of the psalm (verses 1, 3, 6–9).

The text is effectively a report on prayers offered by the psalmist (and probably others on his behalf) concerning a problem not identified here. The psalmist then shares what happened as a result of his patient entreaties.

Although waiting is often seen as something we ponder in Advent, we also find the same theme here, developed further, and linked to trust and thanksgiving. The 'new song' of the first stanza is this psalm itself.

True thanksgiving will lead naturally to telling others of one's experience. The psalmist does this by making use of his senses in easily understood language: lips and mouth, ear, heart, and also in total self-giving: 'Here am I'. This phrase reminds us of the answer Samuel gave to God in this week's First Reading (1 Samuel 3: 3–10, 19), and the same words are also used in the letter to the Hebrews, where the author attributes them to Jesus (Hebrews 10: 5). The traditional 'sacrifices and burnt offerings' mentioned by the psalmist are then as nothing compared to the gift of oneself, as Jesus shows on the cross.



People used to think at the time that God kept a book of records of each person's actions, hence the 'scroll of the book'. We find a similar idea in Psalm 138 (139): 16: 'You had scrutinised my every action, all were recorded in your book'.

In these few verses we can appreciate the delight of the one whose prayers are answered. The psalmist will give of himself doing the will of the Lord, and by telling others about his goodness and faithfulness.

Gospel John 1: 35–42

This passage focuses on the call of the first disciples, Andrew and a friend. St John's account is very different from that of the other evangelists (Matthew 4:1 8–22, Mark 1: 16–20 and Luke 5: 1–11): only John tells us that the first disciples were originally followers of John the Baptist.

'Look, there is the Lamb of God!'

This title given to Jesus seems to have different possible origins. The image of the lamb was used in Isaiah's song of the suffering servant (53: 7, 12) and also in the book of Revelation (5: 6 and 7: 17), where the lamb is linked to sacrifice and to the Messiah. The other explicit reference is that of the Passover lamb (Exodus 12: 21–23). John portrays Jesus as dying at the time when the Passover lambs were killed (18: 28; 19: 31) and describes his death using terms associated with Passover imagery (19: 29, 36). As so often in this Gospel, we can see multiple layers of interpretation.

The tenth hour

At that time hours were counted from the rising of the sun, so we can assume that it was four o'clock in the afternoon.

One of these two ... was Andrew

We do not know who the other person was. Some scholars suggest it might have been John himself. In Jewish law two witnesses were required to verify an event (see below).

Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter

Andrew is perhaps not one of the best known apostles, yet throughout the Gospel we find him bringing people to Jesus: his brother (1: 40), a boy with five loaves and two fish (6: 8) and some Greeks (12: 20). John's Gospel as a whole is a book of signs: that is, things, events or people that point to someone else. To help others see Jesus, a witness is usually necessary. Here the witness is Andrew, while in later verses Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus, fulfilling the same role. (1: 45)

'You are to be called Cephas – meaning Rock'

It is John's practice to translate Hebrew or Aramaic words ('Rabbi', meaning 'Teacher', or here Cephas, rock). Giving someone a new name is a very powerful sign. It indicates a profound change; a new way of life. In John's Gospel there is no mention of the promise to Peter of primacy in the new Church (Matthew 16: 18). This change of name, though, is connected to the recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.