

We don't choose our misfortunes. People mistreat us. They speak behind our backs. They spread rumors. We fall ill. We lose work. We suffer injury. We don't want misfortunes, but they sometimes bring blessing. We learn lessons through adversity. We gain respect from others. We grow more compassionate. Bad news is hard to accept, but sometimes it leads to unexpected bliss.

Today's first reading is one of the four songs of the suffering servant from the prophet Isaiah. We'll hear the other three at daily mass this week. In today's reading, misfortunes befall this servant. People beat him, plucked his beard, struck him and spit at his face. But he holds that spittle-smearred face like flint. The servant remains passive throughout his passion.

He also remains passive through his blessings. God speaks to him a word that helps him rouse the weary. This servant is open to God, and he has peace, even amid suffering.

This passage from Isaiah foreshadows the passion of Jesus, who accepted the blows of his tormentors and opened his ear to the Father's word.

When we suffer, it is not a sign that God has abandoned us. It may be that God is hoping we will open our ear. God may use us for some other purpose, a good purpose through a misfortune that we would never otherwise choose.