

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Third Sunday of Easter
26 April 2020



Collect

May your people exult for ever, O God,
in renewed youthfulness of spirit,
so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption,
we may look forward in confident hope
to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

Before we are led further into the Easter season by the gospel of John, we pause to hear one of the loveliest of the post-resurrection stories. The gospel of Luke alone tells us about the encounter of the two disciples with the risen Lord on their way to Emmaus. We are reminded “how they had recognised him in the breaking of bread” and reflect on how precious it will be to gather for eucharist once more. In fact in the whole Emmaus story we can recognise the shape of the Mass. Just as the two disciples met up with Jesus, listened to his reading of the scriptures, broke bread with him, and set off on mission, so too in the liturgy we gather, listen to the word of God, sup at the Lord’s table, and go forth. We do not just listen to a time-honoured tale, we enact it as we pray.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

2:14, 22–33

On the day of Pentecost Peter stood up with the Eleven and addressed the crowd in a loud voice: ‘Men of Israel, listen to what I am going to say: Jesus the Nazarene was a man commended to you by God by the miracles and portents and signs that God worked through him when he was among you, as you all know. This man, who was put into your power by the deliberate intention and foreknowledge of God, you took and had crucified by men outside the Law. You killed him, but God raised him to life, freeing him from the pangs of Hades; for it was impossible for him to be held in its power since, as David says of him:

I saw the Lord before me always,
for with him at my right hand nothing can shake me.

So my heart was glad
and my tongue cried out with joy:
my body, too, will rest in the hope
that you will not abandon my soul to Hades
nor allow your holy one to experience
corruption.

You have made known the way of life to me,
you will fill me with gladness through your
presence.’

‘Brothers, no one can deny that the patriarch David himself is dead and buried: his tomb is still with us. But since he was a prophet, and knew that God had sworn him an oath to make one of his descendants succeed him on the throne, what he foresaw and spoke about was the resurrection of the Christ: he is the one who was not abandoned to Hades, and whose body did not experience corruption. God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witness to that. Now raised to the heights by God’s right hand, he has received from the Father the Holy Spirit, who was promised, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit.’

First Reading

We do not spend the fifty days of the Easter season waiting for the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. From start to finish we spend Easter immersed in the Spirit. This is made clear by today’s first reading which is part of Peter’s address to the crowd on the day of Pentecost. It includes a brief summary of the good news, starting with Jesus’ public ministry, going on to his betrayal and execution, and concluding with his resurrection and sending of the Spirit.

But these essential elements of the gospel are set in the context of an argument. Peter wants to establish a case for Jesus as God’s promised one. His speech has a polemical edge to it. He plainly accuses his listeners of responsibility for Jesus’ death while affirming that this was still within God’s larger plan. Speaking to a Jewish audience, he argues for Jesus’ superiority over David, basing his case on an interpretation of Psalm 15/16. The tone of Peter’s speech and the rhetorical style of his argument make the reading difficult for a modern congregation to appreciate.

Neither do they make the reader’s task easy. While the first and final parts of the reading are relatively straightforward, what lies in between is complex. The middle section itself falls into two parts. The first consists of the quotation from the psalm. Readers need to be able to proclaim this in a tone of voice that enables the congregation to hear the quote as an identifiable unit.

The second is the most difficult section of the whole reading. This is where Peter offers an interpretation of the psalm which people unfamiliar with Jewish tradition are likely to find obscure. When the psalm speaks of God saving a body from decay, Peter contends, this cannot refer to David since his burial place was well known; it must refer to Jesus. Unless readers are clear about Peter’s line of argument themselves, the congregation will have little chance of grasping it in one hearing.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 15:1–2, 5, 7–11

R. Lord, you will show us the path of life.

or

R. Alleluia.

Preserve me, God, I take refuge in you.

I say to the Lord: 'You are my God.

O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup;
it is you yourself who are my prize.' **R.**

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel,
who even at night directs my heart.

I keep the Lord ever in my sight:

since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm. **R.**

And so my heart rejoices, my soul is glad;
even my body shall rest in safety.

For you will not leave my soul among the dead,
nor let your beloved know decay. **R.**

You will show me the path of life,
and the fullness of joy in your presence,
at your right hand happiness for ever. **R.**

A reading from the first letter of St Peter

1:17–21

If you are acknowledging as your Father one who has no favourites and judges everyone according to what he has done, you must be scrupulously careful as long as you are living away from your home. Remember, the ransom that was paid to free you from the useless way of life your ancestors handed down was not paid in anything corruptible, neither in silver nor gold, but in the precious blood of a lamb without spot or stain, namely Christ; who, though known since before the world was made, has been revealed only in our time, the end of the ages, for your sake. Through him you now have faith in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory for that very reason – so that you would have faith and hope in God.

Responsorial Psalm

The responsorial psalm incorporates the passage from Psalm 15/16 quoted in the first reading. This is preceded by verses from earlier in the psalm. In its original form the psalm is a prayer of trust and confidence in God. God is the giver of all good things and has the power to save from death.

Set in the context of a Christian liturgy it is intended to take on the meaning attributed to it in Peter's Pentecost speech. We are invited to interpret the psalm as alluding to Jesus' resurrection. Whether respected in its Jewish form or allowed a Christian re-interpretation, the psalm is a confident prayer filled with a spirit of joy and gratitude.

The response is a slight adaptation of a line from the psalm itself. It shares in the tone of the whole psalm. Readers need to be ready to give a clear cue for the congregation's response at the end of the shorter final verse.

Second Reading

After the concentrated prayer that opens the first letter of Peter (last Sunday's reading), the author turns momentarily to exhortation: ". . . you must be scrupulously careful as long as you are living away from your home". This serves as a bridge to some powerful teaching.

The key image is that of the payment of a ransom. What was paid to secure our freedom was nothing less than the precious blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ. This truth has now been revealed in order that we might "have faith and hope in God". The use of ransom as an image to interpret the mystery of redemption has had an interesting history in the Christian tradition.

All that can be said here is that it has generated as much controversy as it has insight.

Once again we are faced with a text that is composed of complex sentences. Even the shorter statements that open and close the reading require careful preparation and proclamation. All the more is this the case with the middle section. This consists of one long and elaborate sentence.

It will repay the reader to identify the essence of the argument, namely that the ransom paid for us was the precious blood of Christ and this truth has only now been revealed. This fundamental assertion is augmented by additional phrases which are meant to shed light on the truth, not obscure it. The task of the reader is to make sure this is what the congregation hears.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke**

24:13–35

Two of the disciples of Jesus were on their way to a village called Emmaus, seven miles from Jerusalem, and they were talking together about all that had happened. Now as they talked this over, Jesus himself came up and walked by their side; but something prevented them from recognising him. He said to them, 'What matters are you discussing as you walk along?' They stopped short, their faces downcast.

Then one of them, called Cleopas answered him, 'You must be the only person staying in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have been happening there these last few days.' 'What things?' he asked. 'All about Jesus of Nazareth' they answered 'who proved he was a great prophet by the things he said and did in the sight of God and of the whole people; and how our chief priests and our leaders handed him over to be sentenced to death, and had him crucified. Our own hope had been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all: two whole days have gone by since it all happened; and some women from our group have astounded us: they went to the tomb in the early morning, and when they did not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our friends went to the tomb and found everything exactly as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.'

Then he said to them, 'You foolish men! So slow to believe the full message of the prophets! Was it not ordained that the Christ should suffer and so enter into his glory?' Then, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets, he explained to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself.

When they drew near to the village to which they were going, he made as if to go on; but they pressed him to stay with them. 'It is nearly evening' they said 'and the day is almost over.' So he went in to stay with them. Now while he was with them at the table, he took the bread and said the blessing; then he broke it and handed it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognised him; but he had vanished from their sight. Then they said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us as he talked to us on the road and explained the scriptures to us?'

They set out that instant and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven assembled together with their companions, who said to them, 'Yes it is true, The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon.' Then they told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised him at the breaking of bread.

Gospel

The beauty of the Emmaus story is that it engages us in all of our humanity. It is so wonderfully told that we are drawn deeply into the experience of the two disciples. We join them on their journey, a physical journey that becomes a journey of heart and mind and soul. We share their despondency, we feel the rekindling of their hope, we identify with their generous hospitality to the stranger, we are astonished by what is revealed to them, and we are filled with their exuberant joy.

Every time we hear this story we are summoned out of darkness into light, out of grief into gladness. We are invited into a world of generous hospitality – not the world of our limited efforts to welcome others but the world of unbounded divine hospitality to us.

Whenever we hear this story our eyes are opened to recognise that what happened at Emmaus is what happens when we meet for eucharist: we gather, listen to the word of God, sup at the Lord's table, and go forth. This is the dynamic movement hidden in the static names for the parts of the Mass: Introductory rites, Liturgy of the Word, Liturgy of the Eucharist, Concluding rites. Would that we recognised the risen Lord in our breaking of bread and were impelled forth with the burning desire to share the good news with the world!

Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)

or

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)