

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Second Sunday of Easter
19 April 2020



Collect

God of everlasting mercy,
who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast
kindle the faith of the people you have made your own,
increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed,
that all may grasp and rightly understand
in what font they have been washed,
by whose Spirit they have been reborn,
by whose Blood they have been redeemed.
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

With only two exceptions (the third Sunday of Easter and Ascension Sunday) the gospel reading throughout the Easter season is taken from John. The first reading always comes from the Acts of the Apostles. What varies from year to year is the source of the second reading: in Year A the first letter of Peter, in Year B the first letter of John, in Year C the book of Revelation.

There is an additional difference on this Sunday. The gospel reading (John 20:19–31) remains the same each year while the first and second readings vary.

For most of the liturgical year there is an explicit connection between the first reading from the Hebrew scriptures and the gospel; during some seasons there is a deliberate link between the second reading and one or both of the other two. Things are different during the Easter season. There is no formal link between any of the readings but in one way or another they combine to teach us about life in the Spirit of the risen Lord. This is the time of mystagogical catechesis for the newly baptised; the whole community joins them in exploring the implications of baptism.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

2:42–47

The whole community remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles, to the brotherhood, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers.

The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone.

The faithful all lived together and owned everything in common; they sold their goods and possessions and shared out the proceeds among themselves according to what each one needed.

They went as a body to the Temple every day but met in their houses for the breaking of bread; they shared their food gladly and generously; they praised God and were looked up to by everyone. Day by day the Lord added to their community those destined to be saved.

First Reading

We start with a snapshot of the early Christian community in Jerusalem. Luke paints an idyllic picture of a harmonious, faithful, prayerful and joyful community that shared everything “gladly and generously”.

It is best to see this as an idealised portrait, Luke’s sketch of what a Christian community should look like. There is evidence elsewhere in the Acts of the Apostles that this ideal was not always realised in full. Indeed most of Paul’s letters were occasioned by reports of serious problems within the communities he had founded. However much the reality fell short, the ideal that Luke puts before us is still valid and powerfully attractive.

The reading should be a delight to proclaim. Each of the four features of the community’s life should be given individual emphasis: the teaching of the apostles, the brotherhood (“fellowship” in the NRSV), the breaking of bread, and the prayers. The rest of the reading elaborates on these. The spiritual power emanating from the community brought healing to many, and the joyous sharing of everything in common attracted others to join them.

Listeners should find themselves moved by the persuasive appeal of this text.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 117: 2–4, 13–15, 22–24

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
his love is everlasting.

or

R. Alleluia.

Let the sons of Israel say:

‘His love has no end.’

Let the sons of Aaron say:

‘His love has no end.’

Let those who fear the Lord say:

‘His love has no end.’ **R.**

I was thrust, thrust down and falling
but the Lord was my helper.

The Lord is my strength and my song;
he was my saviour.

There are shouts of joy and victory
in the tents of the just. **R.**

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.

This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes.

This day was made by the Lord;
we rejoice and are glad. **R.**

A reading from the first letter of St Peter 1:3–9

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who in his great mercy has given us a new birth as his sons, by raising Jesus Christ from the dead, so that we have a sure hope and the promise of an inheritance that can never be spoilt or soiled and never fade away, because it is being kept for you in the heavens. Through your faith, God’s power will guard you until the salvation which had been prepared is revealed at the end of time. This is a cause of great joy for you, even though you may for a short time have to bear being plagued by all sorts of trials; so that, when Jesus Christ is revealed, your faith will have been tested and proved like gold – only it is more precious than gold, which is corruptible even though it bears testing by fire – and then you will have praise and glory and honour. You did not see him, yet you love him; and still without seeing him, you are already filled with a joy so glorious that it cannot be described, because you believe; and you are sure of the end to which your faith looks forward, that is, the salvation of your souls.

Responsorial Psalm

As on Easter Sunday both the response and the verses of the responsorial psalm come from Psalm 117/118. This song of thanksgiving for deliverance from distress was widely used by the early Christian community to interpret Jesus’ death and resurrection.

The response is taken from the very first verse of the psalm. It is a joyful summons to give praise and thanks, entirely apt for the Easter season. Because it has two parts to it, the reader needs to pronounce the end of the first phrase – “for he is good” – with an upward inflexion so that the congregation does not begin to repeat the response prematurely. A brief pause should follow, to allow the second phrase – “his love is everlasting” – to be given its proper attention. A glance at the congregation will help cue them in for their response.

The reader will also need to give clear vocal and visual cues to the congregation for the response to the verses. These are all in six-line form rather than the more common four. From beginning to end the spirit of the psalm is one of heartfelt praise and thanks.

Second Reading

Today’s second reading is the first in a series of six passages read from the first letter of Peter. Unlike those of Paul, this letter is not addressed to a particular Christian community. It seems to be a circular letter sent around Christian communities in what is now the north of Turkey. Whether it was authored by Peter himself or by a later disciple is unclear. Its place and date of composition are also disputed. It may have originated in Rome in the second half of the first century.

The letter is in the form of an exhortation, written to support Christians facing social rejection and opposition because their beliefs and values put them at odds with the dominant culture. The author encourages them to have the courage of their convictions but not to behave in any unnecessarily provocative ways – a challenge that remains to this day. Because it spells out the implications of baptism for Christian living, it is a most appropriate text for reading in the Easter season.

This first extract is also the most difficult. It is an extended prayer of blessing for the gift of salvation. The sentences are long and complex.

Second Reading cont...

Readers will need to study them carefully and rehearse the whole passage aloud several times. It may help to try and write down the key thoughts as short units and to put them in a clear sequence.

This is a reading that cannot be hurried. The reader's task is to guide the congregation through this dense text so that they do not get lost in its forest of phrases. This can only happen if the reader is clear about the core assertions being made and about what is additional and explanatory. In spite of the challenges it presents, this is an inspiring text.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

20:19–31

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.

For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven; for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me. Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Gospel

The importance of today's gospel story is shown by the fact that it led to the original conclusion of John's gospel. The story proper falls into two parts: the appearance of the risen Lord to the assembled disciples on the first Easter Day and his appearance before Thomas a week later.

John presents Jesus' resurrection, his giving the Spirit and the commissioning of the disciples in a single unified sequence. By contrast, the gospel-writer Luke introduces a time-span of forty days before Jesus' ascension, and fifty days before the outpouring of the Spirit. Each is communicating the same profound truth within a different theological framework.

The text for today can be subdivided into four parts. In part one, Jesus appears to the fear-filled disciples and greets them with peace. This twofold greeting should be given strong emphasis. Part two consists of Jesus' commissioning the disciples and breathing out his Spirit upon them. Part three relates the encounter between the risen Lord and the apostle Thomas, culminating in words that implicate us: "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe". The reading comes to a climax with the final summary of the gospel's purpose: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name".

Each part should be heard by the congregation as a distinct unit. The reading as a whole is a wonderful invitation to renew our faith in Jesus and to live in the peace and joy of his Spirit.

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.)