

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

30 January 2022



### Collect

Grant us, Lord our God,  
that we may honour you with all our mind,  
and love everyone in truth of heart.  
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

Whether Jesus coined the phrase, or whether he was quoting a popular saying of the day, the reality of prophets being rejected by their own was already long attested in the Jewish tradition. It becomes a recurring theme in Luke's gospel but with diverse connotations, variously prompting defiance, criticism, sadness and promise.

Today it's in defiance that Jesus reacts to the townsfolk who have turned against him. Later on, he will voice withering criticism of the religious leaders, accusing them of complicity in the killing of prophets (11:49-51). Later still, it's with sadness that he will recall Jerusalem's violent attacks on God's envoys (13:34).

There is an exception to these hostile exchanges. Like Matthew, Luke recalls the blessing Jesus pronounces: "Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude and insult you" (6:22). But there's also a warning to complement it: "Woe to you when all speak well of you, for their ancestors treated the prophets in the same way" (6:26).

All of which is to say that Jesus was under no illusions about the angry and fearful resistance with which human beings fight back against the truth. Nor should we.

**A reading from the prophet Jeremiah**  
**1:4–5, 17–19**

In the days of Josiah, the word of the Lord was addressed to me, saying,

'Before I formed you in the womb  
I knew you;  
before you came to birth  
I consecrated you;  
I have appointed you as  
prophet to the nations.  
So now brace yourself for action.  
Stand up and tell them all I command you.  
Do not be dismayed at their presence,  
or in their presence I will  
make you dismayed.  
I, for my part, today will make you  
into a fortified city,  
a pillar of iron,  
and a wall of bronze  
to confront all this land:  
the kings of Judah, its princes,  
its priests and the country people.  
They will fight against you but shall  
not overcome you,  
for I am with you to deliver you –  
it is the Lord who speaks.'

**Responsorial Psalm**      **Ps 70:1–6, 15, 17**

**R.** I will sing of your salvation.  
In you, O Lord, I take refuge;  
let me never be put to shame.  
in your justice rescue me, free me:  
pay heed to me and save me. **R.**  
Be a rock where I can take refuge,  
a mighty stronghold to save me;  
for you are my rock, my stronghold.  
Free me from the hand of the wicked. **R.**  
It is you, O Lord, who are my hope,  
my trust, O Lord, since my youth.  
On you I have leaned from my birth,  
from my mother's womb you have been my  
help. **R.**  
My lips will tell of your justice  
and day by day of your help.  
O God, you have taught me from my youth  
and I proclaim your wonders still. **R.**

**First Reading**

After a brief historical introduction, the whole of the first chapter of Jeremiah is devoted to his call as a prophet. Today's reading combines the beginning and end of this account, omitting the dialogue between Jeremiah and the Lord as well as the prophet's commissioning. The passage as we have it only hints of the rejection that Jeremiah will experience. In time Christians came to see a parallel between Jeremiah's experience of murderous hostility and Jesus' fate as the prophet from Nazareth.

Another link is the weakness of the nation amid the geopolitical realities of the day. In Jesus' time Judaea and Galilee were subject to the imperial might of Rome; in Jeremiah's the southern kingdom was enmeshed in the struggle between the failing power of Assyria and the growing dominance of Babylon. Jeremiah and Jesus alike refuse to endorse the appeal of armed uprising. Both call instead for conversion of heart and both suffer as a result.

In the face of Jeremiah's diffidence, God makes extraordinary promises. Jeremiah will be a "prophet to the nations . . . a fortified city, a pillar of iron, and a wall of bronze to confront all this land." After the opening sentence that sets the scene, the rest of the reading is cast as God's summons to Jeremiah. As such it should be delivered with a certain grandeur.

**Responsorial Psalm**

The call of Jeremiah is generally dated about 627 BC but how old he was at the time and when he died, supposedly in exile in Egypt, is unknown. If we dare assume he lived to a fair age, then the choice of Psalm 70/71 is entirely apt. Scattered references to old age (only implied in the Lectionary verses) make it a prayer of thanksgiving for having arrived safely at that late stage of life.

Age aside, the psalm certainly mirrors Jeremiah's experience of surviving hostile attacks from enemies. This is alluded to in the psalmist's petitions for rescue, refuge and deliverance. In Jeremiah's case God promised to make him strong and impregnable; in the psalm it's God who is addressed as "my rock, my stronghold."

There is one explicit connection between the psalmist and the prophet. God tells Jeremiah, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" while the psalmist declares, "from my mother's womb you have been my help."

Care needs to be taken with the response. It's brief but alive with energy. It should be declared with joy and conviction. The psalm alternates smoothly between petitions and expressions of trust. Readers should adjust their delivery to respect these variations as they pray the verses.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul  
to the Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13**

[Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them.

If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fullness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.]

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous; love is never boastful or conceited; it is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence, and is not resentful. Love takes no pleasure in other people's sins but delights in the truth; it is always ready to excuse, to trust, to hope, and to endure whatever comes.

Love does not come to an end. But if there are gifts of prophecy, the time will come when they must fail; or the gift of languages, it will not continue for ever; and knowledge - for this, too, the time will come when it must fail. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophesying is imperfect; but once perfection comes, all imperfect things will disappear. When I was a child, I used to talk like a child, and think like a child, and argue like a child, but now I am a man, all childish ways are put behind me. Now we are seeing a dim reflection in a mirror; but then we shall be seeing face to face. The knowledge that I have now is imperfect; but then I shall know as fully as I am known.

In short, there are three things that last: faith, hope and love; and the greatest of these is love.

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Luke 4:21–30**

Jesus began to speak in the synagogue, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.' And he won the approval of all, and they were astonished by the gracious words that came from his lips.

They said, 'This is Joseph's son surely?' But he replied, 'No doubt you will quote me the saying, "Physician, heal yourself" and tell me, "We have heard all that happened in Capernaum, do the same here in your own countryside."' And he went on, 'I tell you solemnly, no prophet is ever accepted in his own country.

'There were many widows in Israel, I can assure you, in Elijah's day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any one of these: he was sent to the widow at Zarephath, a Sidonian town. And in the prophet Elisha's time there were many lepers in Israel, but none of these was cured, except the Syrian, Naaman.'

When they heard this everyone in the synagogue was enraged. They sprang to their feet and hustled him out of the town; and they took him up to the brow of the hill their town was built on, intending to throw him down the cliff, but he slipped through the crowd and walked away.

**Second Reading**

One of the most well-known and best-loved passages in the whole of Paul's writing is the hymn to love in chapter 13 of 1 Corinthians. It's a challenge for modern scholars to produce a translation that is both faithful to Paul and of sufficient literary quality to rival that of the King James Bible.

What might be called the hymn proper (vv. 4-7) is the second of three parts. All three are contained in the Lectionary's longer version of the reading; the shorter option omits part one. The full reading begins with a brief introduction that leads into Paul's insistence on the superiority of love over gifts such as eloquence, prophecy, faith, almsgiving and even martyrdom.

With that point vividly made, Paul turns to the qualities of love, expressed both positively and negatively. These two parts form the reading that's popular at weddings. In the final part Paul combines persuasive assertions with practical images to argue that spiritual gifts like prophecy, languages and knowledge pass away, leaving only faith, hope and love. Of these three, love is the greatest.

This is a privileged text for readers to proclaim. They will rise to the occasion if they deliver it with joy, as if they have discovered its profound wisdom for the first time and are now eager to share their delight with the whole assembly.

**Gospel**

The final sentence of last Sunday's gospel serves as the stepping stone into part two of the story. In his home-town synagogue Jesus has read out a messianic text from the prophet Isaiah. Now he declares it fulfilled. The community reacts at first with enthusiasm but in the blink of an eye this appreciation is poisoned by doubt then worsens to the lethal antagonism from which Jesus withdraws. As the evangelist John would have put it, Jesus' hour had not yet come, and he slips away.

We cannot know what recollection of this episode Luke is putting to use, but it clearly encapsulates the larger story of Jesus' mission. All three synoptic gospels trace the same pattern: early popularity giving way to growing opposition before culminating in betrayal and violent death. Perhaps with volume two of his writing in mind – the Acts of the Apostles – Luke uses the example of Elijah and Elisha to foreshadow the Church's mission beyond the confines of Israel.

Being the great story-teller that he is, Luke weaves word, feeling and action together to create a thrilling drama. As he did in his infancy narrative, he takes a very human situation and gives it theological depth. Ministers of the word who relay this story with relish should have no trouble capturing and maintaining the assembly's full attention.

## Concluding Blessing

May almighty God bless us in his kindness  
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

**Amen.**

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith  
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

**Amen.**

May he turn our steps towards himself  
and show us the path of charity and peace.

**Amen.**

And may the blessing of almighty God,  
the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit,  
come down on us and remain with us for ever.

**Amen.**

(Adapted from the Solemn Blessing for Ordinary Time III, Roman Missal p 715)