

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

13 February 2022



Collect

O God, who teach us that you abide
in hearts that are just and true,
grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace
as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.
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

Trust in human beings versus trust in God, sin and death versus resurrection, blessedness versus woe. These are the choices put before us in turn by Jeremiah, the psalmist, Paul the apostle and finally Jesus himself.

Each is cast as an either-or option with no middle ground. Immediately we object that this isn't fair, life is too complex to be reduced to such clear-cut alternatives. We want to say it's often quite unclear to us what the right or best decision may be, and even if it is, circumstances usually constrain our freedom to act.

True enough, life is busy, complicated and conflicted these days. All the more reason to step back from the hurly-burly of everyday life and scrutinise our decision-making through these sharply focussed lenses. It's a process of discernment. In the balance, are we choosing what is life-giving or are we putting our faith in transitory and insubstantial things? Surely in our heart of hearts we want to flourish, to be fully alive, and to know the joy of being blessed. Away with excuses, choose life.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah 17:5–8

The Lord says this:

'A curse on the man who puts his trust in man,
who relies on things of flesh,
whose heart turns from the Lord.
He is like dry scrub in the wastelands:
if good comes, he has no eyes for it,
he settles in the parched places of the wilderness,
a salt land, uninhabited.

'A blessing on the man who puts his trust in the Lord,
with the Lord for his hope.
He is like a tree by the waterside
that thrusts its roots to the stream:
when the heat comes it feels no alarm,
its foliage stays green;
it has no worries in a year of drought,
and never ceases to bear fruit.'

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 1:1–4

R. Happy are they who hope in the Lord.
Happy indeed is the man
who follows not the counsel of the wicked;
nor lingers in the way of sinners
nor sits in the company of scorners,
but whose delight is the law of the Lord
and who ponders his law day and night. **R.**
He is like a tree that is planted
beside the flowing waters,
that yields its fruit in due season
and whose leaves shall never fade;
and all that he does shall prosper. **R.**
Not so are the wicked, not so!
For they like winnowed chaff
shall be driven away by the wind.
For the Lord guards the way of the just
but the way of the wicked leads to doom. **R.**

First Reading

The books of the prophets contain a great diversity of material ranging across stories, oracles, visions and prayers. Some of the prayers either replicate psalms or imitate their form. The first reading today is a clear example. It's a close parallel of Psalm 1. Like the psalm, it contrasts the way of the wicked with the way of the just, except in reverse order.

This text may have been inserted by a later editor. It's in the style of the wisdom literature of ancient times. Wisdom was a prized virtue in the cultures with which Israel interacted and from which it borrowed. It did not necessarily presume faith in Israel's God. It was the human capacity to discern the proper order of things in creation and human affairs and to make appropriate moral choices.

This passage from Jeremiah, however, is certainly informed by faith. It contrasts those who put their trust in human beings with those who put their hope in the Lord. Striking images are employed to illustrate the contrast. Dry scrub, wasteland, parched places, and uninhabited salt land are set off against waterside trees, flowing streams, green foliage and unending fruit. The reader's aim should be to enable the assembly to visualise these contrasting scenarios and be persuaded to choose wisdom over folly. The NRSV offers an inclusive-language alternative.

Responsorial Psalm

How and when the Book of Psalms was formed into its traditional shape it is a mystery that is unlikely ever to be solved. It is assumed that various collections of psalms were circulating until the compilation that we are familiar with was finalised. What is clear is that many of the psalms were composed for use in temple worship. Somewhat strangely, the psalm chosen to head the whole book is not one of these. Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm. It is a meditation on right versus false living.

As noted above it is very similar to the reading from Jeremiah. The first of the three verses establishes the contrast between the wicked and the just. The second extols the way of the wise while the third exposes the fate of the wicked. The difference between them is "the law of the Lord." For devout Jews, the Law was God's gracious gift that gave them identity and security. Those who make the Law their guide stand firm like a well-established tree; those who do not are blown about "like winnowed chaff."

The most common pattern for the verses of the responsorial psalm is a stanza of four lines. Readers will need to deliver the exceptional six- and five-line verses of today's psalm with care and give the assembly clear vocal and visual cues for the response.

**A reading from the first letter of
St Paul to the Corinthians 15:12, 16–20**

If Christ raised from the dead is what has been preached, how can some of you be saying that there is no resurrection of the dead? For if the dead are not raised, Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins. And what is more serious, all who have died in Christ have perished. If our hope in Christ has been for this life only, we are the most unfortunate of all people.

But Christ has in fact been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of all who have fallen asleep.

Second Reading

The whole of the long fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians is devoted to the resurrection. It falls into three parts, the first of which – on the resurrection of Christ – was read last Sunday. The second, from which today's reading comes, is on the connection between Christ's resurrection and that of the faithful. The third and final section, heard in part next Sunday, is on how the resurrection of the dead takes place and what kind of body the raised will have.

Paul begins by claiming (in question form) that because Christ has been raised, as he has preached, then the dead must also be raised. Then he goes off in the other direction, arguing that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ hasn't been raised. In that case Christian faith is a terrible mistake and there's nothing to hope for. Finally he returns to where he began but with a positive assertion. Christ has been raised and so have those who have "fallen asleep."

It may be too much to expect the congregation to follow the toing and froing of Paul's argumentation, but the essential message should be clear. Paul is affirming two fundamental truths. One, Christ has been raised from the dead, as he has testified. Two, Christ's resurrection has paved the way for ours. The reading is short, and the bulk of it is couched in negative terms. Readers shouldn't shy away from its downbeat content but must ensure they deliver the final affirmation with clarity and conviction.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke 6:17, 20–26**

Jesus came down with the Twelve and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and from Jerusalem and from the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases.

Then fixing his eyes on his disciples he said:

'How happy are you who are poor;
yours is the kingdom of God.

Happy you who are hungry now:
you shall be satisfied.

Happy you who weep now: you shall laugh.

'Happy are you when people hate you, drive you out, abuse you, denounce your name as criminal, on account of the Son of Man. Rejoice when that day comes and dance for joy, for then your reward will be great in heaven. This was the way their ancestors treated the prophets.

'But alas for you who are rich: you are having your consolation now. Alas for you who have your fill now: you shall go hungry. Alas for you who laugh now: you shall mourn and weep. 'Alas for you when the world speaks well of you! This was the way their ancestors treated the false prophets.'

Gospel

No doubt many a student has been directed to compare and contrast Matthew's beatitudes with Luke's list of blessings and woes. At one level it's a simple enough task. Matthew has Jesus deliver his sermon from the hillside. It's addressed to crowds that have come from as far away as the Decapolis and "beyond the Jordan." The beatitudes promise benefits that are primarily spiritual in nature.

Luke has Jesus speak not from a hill but from "a piece of level ground." In spite of the crowd that has travelled even from Tyre and Sidon, Jesus addresses his words not to them but to the disciples. He follows his quartet of beatitudes with an equal number of woes. They are very concrete and immediate. They deal with the all too familiar realities of poverty, hunger, grief and rejection and their unworthy counterparts, riches, surfeit, frivolity and status.

Luke's uncompromising placement of beatitude and woe in direct opposition reflects the sharp contrast between wisdom and folly spelt out by Jeremiah and the psalmist. Our initial instinct might be to dismiss these polarities as too extreme. That would excuse us from the challenge of the deep discernment that Luke demands.

Concluding Blessing

May almighty God always keep every adversity far from us
and in his kindness pour out upon us the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May God keep our hearts attentive to his words,
that they may be filled with everlasting gladness.

Amen.

And so, may we always understand what is good and right,
and be found ever hastening along
in the path of God's commands,
made coheirs with the citizens of heaven.

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 V, Roman Missal p 716)