

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C

20 February 2022



Collect

Grant, we pray, almighty God,
that, always pondering spiritual things,
we may carry out in both word and deed
that which is 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

It will be another four months before we hear it, but there's a key verse in Luke's gospel that's pertinent for today. It's this: "As the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem" (9:51). This marks a turning point in Luke's narrative. From that point on until Jesus' arrival in the holy city, all he says and does is set in the framework of this journey.

With this in mind, Luke transfers much of the material in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount to the setting of this journey. His Sermon on the Plain is thus much briefer but no less compelling, as today's gospel makes clear. Love your enemies, do not retaliate, give without hope of return, refuse to judge, be infinitely compassionate. The commands are uncompromising and humanly overwhelming.

Luke has already anticipated our reaction to their unreasonableness. The angel of annunciation told Mary that "nothing will be impossible with God." It's only by appreciating the boundless generosity and all-embracing love of God and aligning ourselves with it that we can fulfil the demands Jesus makes of us. The wonderful image of the "full measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" poured into our lap needs to be constantly at the forefront of our minds.

A reading from the first book of Samuel
26:2, 7-9, 12-13, 22-23

Saul set off and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, accompanied by three thousand men chosen from Israel to search for David in the wilderness of Ziph.

So in the dark David and Abishai made their way towards the force, where they found Saul asleep inside the camp, his spear stuck in the ground beside his head, with Abner and the troops lying round him.

Then Abishai said to David, 'Today God has put your enemy in your power; so now let me pin him to the ground with his own spear. Just one stroke! I will not need to strike him twice.' David answered Abishai, 'Do not kill him, for who can lift his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?' David took the spear and the pitcher of water from beside Saul's head, and they made off. No one saw, no one knew, no one woke up; they were all asleep, for a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen on them.

David crossed to the other side and halted on the top of the mountain a long way off; there was a wide space between them. David then called out, 'Here is the king's spear. Let one of the soldiers come across and take it. The Lord repays everyone for his uprightness and loyalty. Today the Lord put you in my power, but I would not raise my hand against the Lord's anointed.'

Responsorial Psalm Ps 102:1-4, 8, 10, 12-13

R. The Lord is kind and merciful.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,
all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord
and never forget all his blessings. **R.**

It is he who forgives all your guilt,
who heals every one of your ills,
who redeems your life from the grave,
who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**

The Lord is compassion and love,
slow to anger and rich in mercy.
He does not treat us according to our sins
nor repays us according to our faults. **R.**

As far as the east is from the west
so far does he remove our sins.
As a father has compassion on his sons,
the Lord has pity on those who fear him. **R.**

First Reading

The rivalry between Saul, Israel's first king, and his eventual successor David is the subject of the second half of the first book of Samuel. Both characters are flawed. Neither is white-washed in the telling of the story, though today's reading presents David in a favourable light.

For a second time David has the opportunity to kill Saul and chooses to spare him. He appears principled and nobly motivated. One has to read elsewhere in the book to find that David was also ambitious, duplicitous and strategic in his pursuit of power. For his part Saul is portrayed as a tragic figure. Gifted with qualities that equipped him to be king, in time he sows the seeds of his own demise.

The author of 1 Samuel devotes a whole chapter to today's episode and it's worth reading in full. It's been condensed quite successfully for use as the first reading. The story unfolds dramatically as the hunter, Saul, becomes the prey, only to be spared by the fugitive David. Like many a good story it alternates between action and dialogue and has a clear beginning, middle and end, all of which should encourage readers to tell it well.

They need to be mindful of the fact that while the congregation may know the names of the chief protagonists, Saul and David, the story itself is probably unfamiliar. All the more reason for readers to deliver it with clarity and energy, once they have checked the pronunciation of all the names. Above all they need to highlight the conclusion that connects the story with the gospel of the day.

Responsorial Psalm

The opening verse of Psalm 102/103 is an internal dialogue within the psalmist who calls on his soul to give thanks. As the psalm goes on it shifts from being an individual's thanksgiving for deliverance to a profession of faith in the mercy of God. It becomes public testimony.

This transition is evident in the verses selected for the responsorial psalm. The third and fourth stanzas repeat the self-description God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai when the tablets of the Law were handed over for a second time (Exodus 34:6-7). This authoritative declaration of God's kindness and mercy might be said to capture the essence of the entire covenant with Israel. It's the kernel of Israel's faith and as such is repeated elsewhere in the Old Testament.

In drawing constant attention to the Lord's compassion, the psalm prepares us for Jesus' directive in today's gospel: "Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." Other facets of God's goodness, such as mercy, healing and pity, are gratefully acknowledged in the psalm. This sustained appreciation of the unbounded goodness of God should make this psalm a joy for readers to pray. The response is short and simple, and the verses and vocabulary straightforward.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians**

15:45– 49

The first man, Adam, as scripture says, became a living soul; but the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit. That is, first the one with the soul, not the spirit, and after that, the one with the spirit. The first man, being from the earth, is earthly by nature; the second man is from heaven. As this earthly man was, so are we on earth; and as the heavenly man is, so are we in heaven. And we, who have been modelled on the earthly man, will be modelled on the heavenly man.

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

6:27–38

Jesus said to his disciples: 'I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To the man who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek too; to the man who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from the man who robs you. Treat others as you would like them to treat you. If you love those who love you, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what thanks can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what thanks can you expect? Even sinners lend to sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good, and lend without any hope of return. You will have a great reward, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

'Be compassionate as your Father is compassionate. Do not judge, and you will not be judged yourselves; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned yourselves; grant pardon, and you will be pardoned. Give, and there will be gifts for you: a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over, will be poured into your lap; because the amount you measure out is the amount you will be given back.'

Second Reading

The third and last section of Paul's chapter on the resurrection begins with a two-fold question: "How are dead people raised, and what sort of body do they have when they come back?" (15:35). Today's reading is part of Paul's answer to the second question. It's short but doubly difficult to follow. In the first place, the reading does not include the question itself, so there's no lead-in to the answer. Secondly, to fully understand Paul's explanation one needs to be familiar with both the biblical tradition and the philosophy of the Greco-Roman world.

Paul develops his thought on the basis of antitheses. On the one hand there is Adam, the first earthly man, who is a "living soul" in the natural order of things. On the other there is Christ, the "last Adam," who is a "life-giving spirit" in the heavenly realm. In brief Paul is saying that we who are fashioned in the image of the earthly man will be refashioned in the image of the heavenly one.

The verses that precede the reading had already established this but of course we haven't heard them. What is sown perishable, contemptible and weak, Paul has said, is raised imperishable, glorious and powerful. Natural soul becomes heavenly spirit.

Readers will be under no illusion that the assembly will find this text easy to follow. It calls for a well-prepared, steady and distinct delivery to make it as intelligible as possible.

Gospel

If the disciples thought that Jesus was going to extremes with his beatitudes and woes, they would have found no relief in what followed. In words now addressed to "you who are listening," Jesus calls for the renunciation of retaliation, judgement and condemnation. In their place generosity, selflessness, compassion and forgiveness are to be embraced. And all of these demands are prefaced by the toughest one of all, love your enemies.

Much of this material finds its counterpart in Matthew's Sermon on the Mount but Luke modifies the language and the arrangement somewhat. Some might be relieved at one change he makes. Matthew's call to be perfect like the Father is changed to "be compassionate as your Father is compassionate." The language is softer even if the injunction is not.

Luke doesn't include Matthew's image of the sun shining and the rain falling indiscriminately on the bad, the good, the honest and the dishonest. Instead he proffers an appealing image of his own. Human generosity will be met with a divine generosity that's like grain being poured freely into the cloak the recipient holds out until it overflows.

It might be tempting for the minister of the word to hasten through these challenging imperatives but the congregation should not be deprived of their original shock value.

Concluding Blessing

May God bless us with every heavenly blessing,
make us always holy and pure in his sight,
pour out in abundance upon us the riches of his glory,
and teach us with the words of truth;
may he instruct us in the Gospel of salvation,
and ever endow us with fraternal charity.
Through Christ our Lord.

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 VI, Roman Missal p 717)

