

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

6 February 2022



Collect

Keep your family safe, O Lord, with unfailing care,
that, relying solely on the hope of heavenly grace,
they may be defended always by your protection.
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

A non-believer who chanced upon a Sunday Mass would hear the congregation sing or recite the “Holy, holy, holy” acclamation that concludes the preface. Sad to say, the odds are that this visitor would fail to get a vivid impression of the awe and exuberance that the words originally embodied. They were born out of deeply felt religious experiences.

The first was the vision of divine majesty that summoned Isaiah to his prophetic mission. He saw celestial beings lauding the glorious holiness of God with their chant, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts” (Is 6:3). The second part of the text – “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord” – comes from a hymn of jubilation sung as the king and priests and people entered the temple (Psalm 117/118: 26). Much later it was chanted enthusiastically by the crowds to welcome Jesus to Jerusalem as messiah (Lk 19:38).

Ideally, every time worshippers voice these words they glimpse the splendour of God as Isaiah did and join with the crowds of Jerusalem acclaiming Jesus as God’s anointed one. Sung or recited with reverence they make a splendid confession of faith and praise.

A reading from the prophet Isaiah 6:1–8

In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord seated on a high throne; his train filled the sanctuary; above him stood seraphs, each one with six wings.

And they cried out one to another in this way,

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts.
His glory fills the whole earth.'

The foundations of the threshold shook with the voice of the one who cried out, and the Temple was filled with smoke. I said:

'What a wretched state I am in! I am lost,
for I am a man of unclean lips
and I live among a people of unclean lips,
and my eyes have looked at the King,
the Lord of hosts.'

Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding in his hand a live coal which he had taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. With this he touched my mouth and said:

'See now, this has touched your lips,
your sin is taken away,
your iniquity is purged.'

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying:

'Whom shall I send?
Who will be our messenger?'

I answered, 'Here I am, send me.'

First Reading

Last week the call of Jeremiah, today that of Isaiah. Each protests his unworthiness and each is assured of divine assistance (as is Peter in today's gospel). Isaiah's mission precedes that of Jeremiah by over a century. It begins around 742 BC when Uzziah dies and is replaced by Jotham as king of Judah.

Isaiah's experience of God is profound. It shakes him to the core. With his mind's eye he sees the heavenly court where, above the enthroned Lord, heavenly beings chant together in praise. A voice thunders, the foundations shake, smoke fills the holy place. At the sight of such awe-inspiring glory Isaiah becomes acutely aware of his unworthiness. Assured of forgiveness and conscious of God's call, he responds unequivocally, "Here I am, send me."

The story is told vividly and succinctly. It reads like a self-contained one-act play, ranging all the way from the heights of heaven to the depths of human shame. In order of appearance the characters are the narrator, the seraphs, the prophet and the Lord. Readers will need to ensure that each of these voices is distinctly articulated. They have the opportunity to convey all the drama of this divine-human encounter, proclaiming it with dignified confidence.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 137:1–5, 7–8

R. In the sight of the angels
I will sing your praises, Lord.

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart,
you have heard the words of my mouth.
Before the angels I will bless you.
I will adore before your holy temple. **R.**

I thank you for your faithfulness and love
which excel all we ever knew of you.
On the day I called, you answered;
you increased the strength of my soul. **R.**

All earth's kings shall thank you
when they hear the words of your mouth.
They shall sing of the Lord's ways:
How great is the glory of the Lord! **R.**

You stretch out your hand and save me,
your hand will do all things for me.
Your love, O Lord, is eternal,
discard not the work of your hands. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Almost the whole of Psalm 137/138 is used as the responsorial psalm. It's a hymn of praise for God who comes to the aid of those who cry out in time of need. It's a fitting choice to follow on from the story of Isaiah's call, given what they have in common.

Both feature heavenly beings, either seraphs or angels, and both are located in the temple of God's presence. The action of the seraph in touching Isaiah's lips to purge away his sins is hinted at in the last verse when the psalmist thanks God for the hand that stretches out to save him. The psalm is distinguished by its pervasive spirit of confidence and thankfulness rather than the high drama of Isaiah's encounter with the holiness of God.

The language and shape of the verses present no difficulty for the reader. The congregation, however, may be a little hesitant with the unfamiliar response – "In the sight of the angels I will sing your praises, Lord" – and may need extra support from the reader with the first repetition.

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

15:1– 11

[Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, the gospel that you received and in which you are firmly established; because the gospel will save you only if you keep believing exactly what I preached to you – believing anything else will not lead to anything.

Well then,] in the first place, I taught you what I had been taught myself, namely that Christ died for our sins, in accordance with the scriptures; that he was buried; and that he was raised to life on the third day, in accordance with the scriptures; that he appeared first to Cephas and secondly to the Twelve. Next he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died; then he appeared to James, and then to all the apostles; and last of all he appeared to me too; it was as though I was born when no one expected it.

[I am the least of the apostles; in fact, since I persecuted the Church of God, I hardly deserve the name apostle; but by God's grace that is what I am, and the grace that he gave me has not been fruitless. On the contrary, I, or rather the grace of God that is with me, have worked harder than any of the others;] but what matters is that I preach what they preach, and this is what you all believed.

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

5:1–11

Jesus was standing one day by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the crowd pressing round him listening to the word of God, when he caught sight of two boats close to the bank. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats – it was Simon's – and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water and pay out your nets for a catch.' 'Master,' Simon replied 'we worked hard all night long and caught nothing, but if you say so, I will pay out the nets.' And when they had done this they netted such a huge number of fish that their nets began to tear, so they signalled to their companions in the other boat to come and help them; when these came, they filled the two boats to sinking point.

When Simon Peter saw this he fell at the knees of Jesus saying, 'Leave me, Lord; I am a sinful man.' For he and all his companions were completely overcome by the catch they had made; so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's partners. But Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on it is men you will catch.' Then, bringing their boats back to land, they left everything and followed him.

Second Reading

For the third week in a row, the choice of a full or abbreviated text for the second reading is provided. The fact that the first reading and the gospel are both moderately long may favour the choice of the shorter version. The minor disadvantage of this is that the final sentence becomes a slightly awkward postscript because the preceding verses have been omitted.

The longer reading falls into three parts. The first is an admonition from Paul, warning the Corinthians not to deviate from the teaching he gave them. The second part, which constitutes almost all of the shorter reading, is a catechesis on the paschal mystery, augmented by a list of Jesus' resurrection appearances. The third and final part is Paul's claim to be regarded as an authentic apostle, albeit "the least" of them.

The vocabulary should present no difficulty for the reader. What is more problematic is the fertility of Paul's mind and his habit of letting his ideas lead him where they will. This generates long and complex sentences in which phrases and clauses pile up on one another. Readers would be wise to study this text carefully and read it aloud a number of times, until they are satisfied they have a good grasp of the argument themselves. Their aim should be to enable the assembly to understand in one hearing what they have put much work into preparing.

Gospel

Mark and Matthew place the call of the four fishermen at the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. Luke delays telling the story, perhaps for two reasons. One, it allows him to prepare for it with an account of Jesus' initial ministry of healing and preaching. Awareness of his success would make the ready response of the two pairs of brothers more plausible. Two, it presents their response as a counter-example to the rejection Jesus had experienced from his neighbours in Nazareth.

Like Isaiah, when Peter finds himself in the presence of awesome power, he is overcome by feelings of unworthiness. This makes for an interesting comparison with the other story of a miraculous catch of fish in the post-resurrection appendix to John's gospel. On that occasion Peter appears eager to meet his risen Lord. He is then given the opportunity to reverse his three-fold denial of Jesus with a three-fold affirmation of his love. In each account he receives a commission. In Luke, it's to fish for followers; in John, to feed the flock.

The prominence of Peter in all four gospels lends credence to the claim that he played an authoritative role in the life of the early Christian community. The portrait they paint is appealing for its frankness in depicting Peter's strengths and weaknesses. He is a leader we can identify with.

Concluding Blessing

May the God of all consolation order our days in his peace
and grant us the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May he free us always from every distress
and confirm our hearts in his love.

Amen.

So that on this life's journey
we may be effective in good works,
rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity,
and may come happily to eternal life.

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 IV, Roman Missal p 716)