

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

3rd Sunday of Easter

Year C

1 May 2022



Collect

May your people exult for ever, O God,
in renewed youthfulness of spirit,
so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption,
we may look forward in confident hope
to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection.
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

Reading John's gospel can be both inspiring and frustrating. It's inspiring when it reveals and draws us into the intimacy shared by Father and Son. "No one has ever seen God," John wrote, "it is the only Son, who is nearest to the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18). It's sometimes frustrating when it engages us at a human level then disconcertingly takes us into deep waters.

Today's gospel tells us how the risen Lord appeared to his disciples in Galilee. We are curious. We want to know more. Why have they gone back to Lake Tiberias? Have they abandoned all their hopes? Are they there in obedience to a command of Jesus? What made "the disciple Jesus loved" recognise him as "the Lord"? Why are we told there were 153 fish? These are just some of the many questions that this story raises but does not answer.

John would have us let go of our need for "facts" in favour of grasping a deeper truth. He's inviting us to share in the disciples' apparent hesitation and uncertainty, to be disconcerted by experiences that we neither control nor understand, to be led as Thomas was into a deeper faith. In particular, as we contemplate the scene by the lakeside, with the risen Jesus feeding his disciples bread and fish from the charcoal fire, we might reflect on the eucharistic meal for which we are gathered. Can our eyes be opened to see the divine presence revealed in the assembly, the ministers, the word and the eucharistic gifts? Can we give wholehearted assent to our mission in the world?

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

5:27–32, 40–41

The high priest demanded an explanation of the apostles. 'We gave you a formal warning,' he said 'not to preach in this name, and what have you done? You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and seem determined to fix the guilt of this man's death on us.' In reply Peter and the apostles said, 'Obedience to God comes before obedience to men; it was the God of our ancestors who raised up Jesus, but it was you who had him executed by hanging on a tree. By his own right hand God has now raised him up to be leader and saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness of sins through him to Israel. We are witnesses to all this, we and the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him.' They warned the apostles not to speak in the name of Jesus and released them. And so they left the presence of the Sanhedrin glad to have had the honour of suffering humiliation for the sake of the name.

First Reading

As Luke tells the story, the common life, preaching and healing that characterised the early Christian community in Jerusalem made it popular and attractive. The success it enjoyed provoked the jealousy of the Jewish authorities, especially the Sadducees. The apostles were arrested, gaoled, miraculously freed, re-arrested and brought for trial before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish tribunal. This is the background to today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

Most of it consists of an exchange between the high priest and the apostles. The high priest's accusations give the apostles not only the opportunity to defend themselves but to present a succinct account of the good news. It must be noted that the apostles' counter-accusation – "it was you who had [Jesus] executed by hanging on a tree" – is aimed at the authorities, not the Jewish people. It must not be misused to fuel anti-Semitism in any way.

The reading concludes with the release of the apostles. Two significant things have been omitted from the Lectionary text. The first is the case presented by the Pharisee Gamaliel that secured the apostles' freedom. He argued that if the Christian movement was merely human, it would fail; if it was of God, they could not prevail against it. This aligns with Luke's overall purpose, to testify to the invincible power of the Holy Spirit driving the growth and spread of the Christian way. The second omission is the report of the apostles being flogged before their release.

As a short courtroom drama, the reading has a strong dynamic: accusation, defence, release. The reader's task is to ensure the congregation follows the action and hears Luke's message loud and clear – the Holy Spirit will not be thwarted.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 29:2, 4–6, 11–13

R. I will praise you, Lord,
for you have rescued me.

or

R. Alleluia.

I will praise you, Lord, you have rescued me
and have not let my enemies rejoice over me.
O Lord, you have raised my soul from the dead,
restored me to life from those who sink into the grave. **R.**

Sing psalms to the Lord, you who love him,
give thanks to his holy name.
His anger lasts but a moment; his favour through life.
At night there are tears, but joy comes with dawn. **R.**

The Lord listened and had pity.
The Lord came to my help.
For me you have changed my mourning into dancing;
O Lord my God, I will thank you for ever. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 29/30 recounts a person's double reversal of fortune. The first reversal seems to have been a life-threatening illness that overturned the psalmist's comfortable security and put him in great peril. The second was his deliverance from the brink of the grave. The psalm is a song of thanks for this rescue and the restoration of divine favour. While the psalmist does not actually die as Jesus does, his prayer has ready application to the death and resurrection of Jesus, hence its use today. It was also used at the Paschal Vigil to follow Isaiah's oracle of restoration (the fourth reading). Phrases such as "raised my soul from the dead" and "restored me to life" immediately evoke the resurrection. Even the words "joy comes with dawn" remind us that it was at dawn when the women went to the tomb and found it empty.

The verses chosen from the psalm do not dwell on the psalmist's suffering. While the danger he endures is alluded to in each of the three stanzas, the dominant spirit of the prayer is one of thanksgiving and praise. Readers should pray it gladly, sustaining a positive delivery through each of the rather long lines.

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse 5:11–14

In my vision, I, John, heard the sound of an immense number of angels gathered round the throne and the animals and the elders; there were ten thousand times ten thousand of them and thousands upon thousands, shouting, 'The Lamb that was sacrificed is worthy to be given power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing.'

Then I heard all the living things in creation – everything that lives in the air, and on the ground, and under the ground, and in the sea, crying, 'To the One who is sitting on the throne and to the Lamb, be all praise, honour, glory and power, for ever and ever.' And the four animals said, 'Amen'; and the elders prostrated themselves to worship.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

21:1–19

Jesus showed himself again to his disciples. It was by the Sea of Tiberias, and it happened like this: Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee and two more of his disciples were together. Simon Peter said, 'I'm going fishing.' They replied, 'We'll come with you.' They went out and got into the boat but caught nothing that night.

It was light by now and there stood Jesus on the shore, though the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus. Jesus called out, 'Have you caught anything, friends?' And when they answered, 'No,' he said, 'Throw the net out to starboard and you'll find something.' So they dropped the net, and there were so many fish that they could not haul it in. The disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord.' At these words 'It is the Lord,' Simon Peter, who had practically nothing on, wrapped his cloak round him and jumped into the water. The other disciples came on in the boat, towing the net and the fish; they were only about a hundred yards from land.

As soon as they came ashore they saw that there was some bread there, and a charcoal fire with fish cooking on it. Jesus said, 'Bring some of the fish you have just caught.' Simon Peter went aboard and dragged the net to the shore, full of big fish, one hundred and fifty-three of them; and in spite of there being so many the net was not broken. Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' None of the disciples was bold enough to ask, 'who are you?'; they knew quite well it was the Lord. Jesus then stepped forward, took the bread and gave it to them, and the same with the fish. This was the third time that Jesus showed himself to the disciples after rising from the dead.

[After the meal Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He answered, 'Yes Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my lambs.' A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He replied 'Yes, Lord, you know I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Look after my sheep.' Then he said to him a third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter was upset that he asked him the third time, 'Do you love me?' and said, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Feed my sheep.

'I tell you most solemnly, when you were young you put on your own belt and walked where you liked; but when you grow old you will stretch out your hands, and somebody else will put a belt around you and take you where you would rather not go.'

In these words he indicated the kind of death by which Peter would give glory to God. After this he said, 'Follow me.']

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Second Reading

In his first vision, reported in last Sunday's reading, the author of the Apocalypse/Revelation was directed to write letters to seven churches in Asia Minor (now western Turkey). The Lectionary leaps over these to a new vision the author has, that of the heavenly court worshipping the Lord God. We hear one segment of this vision in today's reading.

Dazzling sights and deafening sounds fuel our imagination. We see a vast array of heavenly and earthly beings, in effect the entire body of creation, united in praise of God and the Lamb. Their numbers are beyond counting, their shouts of praise thunderous. The chant is like the pulsing beat of blaring trumpets. One after the other, "power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing" are ascribed to the Lamb. A similar litany acclaim both God and the Lamb.

This is a tumultuous scene for the reader to depict with a single voice. Without transgressing into the domain of theatricality, readers should deliver this text with energy, enthusiasm and joy, while taking care not to hasten through either of the catalogues of praise.

Gospel

The final two verses of last Sunday's reading seemed to bring John's gospel to a formal conclusion. But as we see today, there's a whole extra chapter after that, with a similar ending (not included in the reading). Scholars remain divided about the authorship of this apparent appendix, but it has sufficient similarities to the language and style of the overall gospel to lay claim to Johannine authenticity.

Apart from the conclusion, the entire chapter is allocated as today's gospel, with the option of a shortened version. The full reading falls into two clear parts. The first recounts an appearance of the risen Lord to the disciples in Galilee, the second reports on Peter's rehabilitation after his threefold denial. This latter account is omitted from the shorter text. While pastoral reasons might favour the abbreviated version, it's a pity for the community not to hear the deeply personal story of Peter's forgiveness and commissioning. It's never heard on any other Sunday.

Matthew is the only other evangelist to locate an appearance of the risen Lord in Galilee, but his is at a mountain, not by the lakeside. Luke is the only other evangelist to record a miraculous catch of fish, but he situates it at the beginning of Jesus' ministry when Jesus calls his first disciples. How these stories interrelate is an intriguing question.

Both parts of today's gospel are attractive and engaging. They present scenes of human intimacy within the larger matrix of the divine mission. They deserve to be delivered with warmth and affection.

Blessing for Easter

May God, who by the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son
was pleased to confer on us
the gift of redemption and of adoption,
give us gladness by his blessing.

Amen.

May he, by whose redeeming work
we have received the gift of everlasting freedom,
make us heirs to an eternal inheritance.

Amen.

And may we, who have already risen with Christ
in Baptism through faith,
by living in a right manner on this earth,
be united with him in the homeland 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 Easter Time, Roman Missal p 712.)