

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

2nd Sunday of Easter

Year C

24 April 2022



Collect

God of everlasting mercy,
who in the very recurrence of the paschal feast
kindle the faith of the people you have made your own,
increase, we pray, the grace you have bestowed,
that all may grasp and rightly understand
in what font they have been washed,
by whose Spirit they have been reborn,
by whose Blood they have been redeemed.
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

Each of the writings we hear from through the Easter season – the Acts of the Apostles, the Apocalypse/Revelation, and the gospel of John – has its own take on time.

Luke, the author of Acts, allows forty days to elapse between Jesus' resurrection and ascension, with a further ten days before the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. John, by contrast, has Jesus' resurrection, appearance to the disciples and imparting of the Spirit all occurring on Easter Day, with a supplementary appearance to Thomas a week later. The Apocalypse is different again. It is written with an eye on the end times when the power of evil will be finally overthrown.

This might all seem dizzily disconcerting, but in effect each work operates on the “now and not yet” principle. Despite their differing timeframes, they all declare that by his death and resurrection Jesus has definitively overcome the power of sin and death. The baptised share in this victory and are gifted with the Spirit to live accordingly. However, the work of embedding that victory in human hearts and extending it across the face of the earth will remain in progress until the end of time.

We have fifty days of grace to take the paschal mystery to heart and to proclaim it to the world.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 5:12–16

The faithful all used to meet by common consent in the Portico of Solomon. No one else ever dared to join them, but the people were loud in their praise and the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily. So many signs and wonders were worked among the people at the hands of the apostles that the sick were even taken out into the streets and laid on beds and sleeping-mats in the hope that at least the shadow of Peter might fall across some of them as he went past. People even came crowding in from the towns round about Jerusalem, bringing with them their sick and those tormented by unclean spirits, and all of them were cured.

First Reading

The central character in the Acts of the Apostles is the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit who drives the mission of the early Church, especially through its principal agents Peter and Paul. It's the Spirit who gets the gospel from Jerusalem, Israel's city of promise, to Rome, the centre of imperial power. It's the Spirit who ensures that everything (with minor exceptions) goes from strength to strength.

Pentecost quickly bears fruit in the life and witness of the disciples in Jerusalem. Today's reading is the third of Luke's cameos of the first community of believers. He's keen to stress the community's appeal and growth, and above all to affirm continuity between the ministry of Jesus and that of the apostles. Their success in healing the sick and attracting great crowds mirrors that of their Master. There is no explicit reference to the Spirit in the reading, but it's clear that the impressive conversions and healings are not accomplished by the disciples' own efforts.

Luke's generally idyllic picture of the Jerusalem community needs to be complemented by Paul's candid critique of problems and struggles in the churches he founded. Today, however, we allow Luke to inspire us with admiration for the dynamism of the first believers. We understand he's idealising, but he's also testifying to what the Spirit can accomplish in us. This attractive reading should be proclaimed with energy and conviction.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 117:2–4, 22–27

R. Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
his love is everlasting.

or

R. Alleluia.

Let the sons of Israel say:

'His love has no end.'

Let the sons of Aaron say:

'His love has no end.'

Let those who fear the Lord say:

'His love has no end.' **R.**

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.

This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes.

This day was made by the Lord;
we rejoice and are glad. **R.**

○ Lord, grant us salvation;

○ Lord, grant success.

Blessed in the name of the Lord
is he who comes.

We bless you from the house of the Lord;
the Lord God is our light. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

As we've already seen, Psalm 117/118 has a particular affinity with the mystery of death and resurrection. This is its third appearance in eight days, this time differentiated by the selection of verses, the structure and the response. The opening words of the psalm serve as the response. They establish an Easter spirit of praise and thanksgiving for the verses that follow.

Two fragments of the psalm will sound familiar. The first – "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" – is cited in the synoptic gospels, the Acts and in the first letter of Peter to shed light on the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. The second – "Blessed in the name of the Lord is he who comes" – is the cry of the crowd when Jesus entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey. From there it became part of the "Holy, holy, holy" acclamation in the eucharistic prayer.

Readers face a couple of simple challenges with their delivery, both to do with the cues they give to the assembly. The response falls into two parts. There should be a brief pause between them, with a rising tone for the phrase "for he is good" to signal there is more to come. The verses are set out in six lines, not the more usual four, so once again readers will need to use skill to avoid cuing the assembly in too early. These minor difficulties aside, this prayer of praise and thanks should be a pleasure to readers to lead.

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse

1:9–13, 17–19

My name is John, and through our union in Jesus I am your brother and share your sufferings, your kingdom, and all you endure. I was on the island of Patmos for having preached God's word and witnessed for Jesus; it was the Lord's day and the Spirit possessed me, and I heard a voice behind me, shouting like a trumpet, 'Write down all that you see in a book.'

I turned round to see who had spoken to me, and when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands and, surrounded by them, a figure like a Son of man, dressed in a long robe tied at the waist with a golden girdle.

When I saw him, I fell in a dead faint at his feet, but he touched me with his right hand and said, 'Do not be afraid; it is I, the First and the Last; I am the Living One. I was dead and now I am to live for ever and ever, and I hold the keys of death and of the underworld. Now write down all that you see of present happenings and things that are still to come.'

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

20:19–31

In the evening of that same day, the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive, they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Thomas, called the Twin, who was one of the Twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. When the disciples said, 'We have seen the Lord,' he answered, 'Unless I see the holes that the nails made in his hands and can put my finger into the holes they made, and unless I can put my hand into his side, I refuse to believe.' Eight days later the disciples were in the house again and Thomas was with them. The doors were closed, but Jesus came in and stood among them. 'Peace be with you,' he said. Then he spoke to Thomas, 'Put your finger here; look, here are my hands. Give me your hand; put it into my side. Doubt no longer but believe.' Thomas replied, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him:

'You believe because you can see me.

Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe.'

There were many other signs that Jesus worked and the disciples saw, but they are not recorded in this book. These are recorded so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing this you may have life through his name.

Second Reading

Bizarre visions, enigmatic numbers and striking symbols are all employed to evoke the cosmic struggle between good and evil depicted in the Apocalypse. This final book of the Bible, now more generally called Revelation, is a work of great imagination. Presumably written to encourage Christians under cruel persecution by Roman emperors, it trumpets the ultimate victory of good. That much is clear, but the interpretation of specific details is fraught with difficulty, especially when attempts are made to identify figures in the story with contemporary agents of evil.

Today's reading, the first of five in the course of the Easter season, is a slightly abbreviated account of the author's first vision – an awe-inspiring sight of the glorious "Son of man." While the author self-identifies as John, he is more likely to have been a devotee of the apostle and evangelist. What gives the work authority as a tract for persecuted Christians is his claim that he himself had suffered and been exiled for his faith.

The title "Son of man" has many resonances. It's used in the writings of Ezekiel and Daniel and in the gospels to suggest one who is both mortal and heavenly. The emphasis here is on his heavenly power and glory. He is "the First and the Last . . . the Living One."

The reading unfolds plainly enough. The introduction grounds it in time and place. The vision itself comes next, followed by an account of the author's reaction and the powerful message he is given. Readers are not called upon to explain the text but their responsibility is to proclaim as intelligibly as possible.

Gospel

By way of exception, the Lectionary provides only the one gospel text for this Sunday in the three-year cycle, presumably because of its perceived importance in the tradition. It takes us from the evening of Easter Day to John's concluding statement about his gospel-writing purpose.

The reading falls into three parts, each of which provides much food for thought. Part one is John's account of the risen Lord's appearance to his fearful disciples and his giving them the Spirit and their mission of mercy. Part two is the story of Thomas the apostle's dramatic conversion from scepticism to full-blooded faith. Part three is John's sign-off.

Notable points along the way are Jesus' repeated greeting of peace, his re-creating gift of the Spirit, the apostolic commission he gives to the disciples, the conclusion to Thomas' confession of faith – "Happy are those who have not seen and yet believe" – and the evangelist's hope that his work will bring readers to faith and life. It is striking how the horizons of time and space expand as the reading progresses. It begins at night in a closed room, it proceeds with a mission for the apostles in their time, it envisages future generations coming to believe, and it finishes with a hint of eternity.

This rich gospel deserves to be proclaimed with the faith and love it embodies.

Blessing for Easter

May almighty God bless us through today's Easter Solemnity
and, in his compassion,
defend us from every assault of sin.

Amen.

And may he, who restores us to eternal life
in the Resurrection of his Only Begotten,
endow us with the prize of immortality.

Amen.

Now that the days of the Lord's Passion have drawn to a close,
may we who celebrate the gladness of the Paschal Feast
come with Christ's help, and exulting in spirit,
to those feasts that are celebrated in eternal joy.

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, Roman Missal p 422,
given as the optional formula of Solemn Blessing for the Second Sunday of Easter p 433.)