

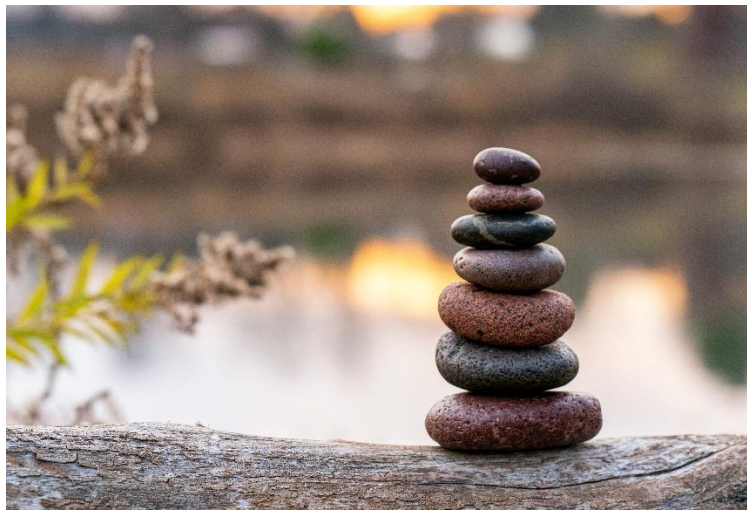
# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Fifth Sunday of Lent

Year C

3 April 2022



### Collect

By your help, we beseech you, Lord our God,  
may we walk eagerly in that same charity  
with which, out of love for the world,  
your Son handed himself over to death.  
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

“I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord.” In this one emphatic declaration Paul puts his life on the line. No ifs and buts, no escape clause, no half measures. And if this wasn’t clear enough, he goes on, “I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ.” Paul’s bold confession is a bracing reality-check for us at this late stage of Lent. Have our weeks of repentance and renewal made us willing to stake our lives on Christ? Are we able to admit that we are deeply fearful of letting go of what gives us security, status and identity – even our present understanding of the Christian faith?

Just before today’s reading from Philippians, Paul lists his Jewish credentials: “born of the race of Israel and of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrew parents . . . circumcised when I was eight days old . . . as for the Law, a Pharisee.” All this rich heritage Paul has to reinterpret after his life-changing encounter with Christ. As biblical scholar N. T. Wright put it, “Paul remained to his dying day fiercely loyal to Israel’s God, seen in fresh and blinding light in Jesus” (*Paul: A Biography*, p. 54). Paul allowed his fierce loyalty to tradition to be radically transformed. Dare we let the Spirit shed new light on our faith in Christ?

## A reading from the prophet Isaiah 43:16–21

Thus says the Lord,  
who made a way through the sea,  
a path in the great waters;  
who put chariots and horse in the field  
and a powerful army,  
which lay there never to rise again,  
snuffed out, put out like a wick:

No need to recall the past,  
no need to think about what was done before.  
See, I am doing a new deed,  
even now it comes to light; can you not see it?  
Yes, I am making a road in the wilderness,  
paths in the wilds.

The wild beasts will honour me,  
jackals and ostriches,  
because I am putting water in the wilderness  
(rivers in the wild)  
to give my chosen people drink.  
The people I have formed for myself  
will sing my praises.

## First Reading

Memory and hope are constantly interwoven in the scriptures and in the liturgy. Today's reading conveys God's invitation to Israel to both remember and hope. It's delivered by the prophet Isaiah to the exiles in Babylon where they languish, uncertain of how long their bondage will last.

The exiles are first called to remember how the ancient exodus began, with the crossing of the sea and the annihilation of the Egyptian army. It was all God's work. Recalling the divine power that set them free long ago provides the basis for trust in the promise of a new exodus, this time from Babylon to Jerusalem. In fact it is more than a new exodus, it is akin to a new creation. Unlike the exodus of old, this time there will be a path in the wilderness, rivers of water to drink, and wild beasts tamed.

The reading falls into two clear but uneven parts. The first and shorter part is an evocative retelling of the exodus. The second, itself in two paragraphs, announces and elaborates on the promise God is making. At the heart of the whole passage is God's declaration, "See, I am doing a new deed." Readers must ensure this dramatic statement captures the assembly's full attention. They should also deliver the final sentence – "The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises" – with a flourish.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 125

**R.** The Lord has done great things for us;  
we are filled with joy.

When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,  
it seemed like a dream.  
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,  
on our lips there were songs. **R.**

The heathens themselves said: What marvels  
the Lord worked for them!  
What marvels the Lord worked for us!  
Indeed we were glad. **R.**

Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage  
as streams in dry land.  
Those who are sowing in tears  
will sing when they reap. **R.**

They go out, they go out, full of tears,  
carrying seed for the sowing:  
they come back, they come back, full of song,  
carrying their sheaves. **R.**

## Responsorial Psalm

Every one of Psalms 119/120 – 133/134 bears the title "a song of ascents." All but one are quite short. They may have been prayed either by pilgrims making their way up to the Temple in Jerusalem or by exiles departing Babylon for the journey home. The whole of Psalm 125/126 serves as the responsorial psalm and is the source of the response.

The prayer is bitter-sweet. The first two verses recall the new exodus promised by the prophet Isaiah. This has been successfully accomplished, much to the Israelites' joy and the pagan nations' astonishment. But this exultation has drained away. It seems that the task of rebuilding is overwhelming them. They feel as though they are in bondage again. They dream of the desert being watered by streams, unpromising land producing a rich harvest, tears being turned to songs of joy.

As in the first reading, memory and hope are threaded through the psalm. The response itself echoes this partnership. Recalling that "The Lord has done great things for us" prompts the assertion "we are filled with joy." This joy is a launching pad for hope. Readers will need to end the first part of the response with an upward inflection so as to cue the assembly to wait for the remainder. They must resist the temptation to run the short lines of the psalm together and deprive them of their poetic energy.

## **A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Philippians**

**3:8–14**

I believe nothing can happen that will outweigh the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For him I have accepted the loss of everything, and I look on everything as so much rubbish if only I can have Christ and be given a place in him. I am no longer trying for perfection by my own efforts, the perfection that comes from the Law, but I want only the perfection that comes through faith in Christ, and is from God and based on faith. All I want is to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and to share his sufferings by reproducing the pattern of his death. That is the way I can hope to take my place in the resurrection of the dead. Not that I have become perfect yet: I have not yet won, but I am still running, trying to capture the prize for which Christ Jesus captured me. I can assure you my brothers, I am far from thinking that I have already won. All I can say is that I forget the past and I strain ahead for what is still to come; I am racing for the finish, for the prize to which God calls us upwards to receive in Christ Jesus.

## **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John**

**8:1–11**

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them.

The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in full view of everybody, they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, and Moses has ordered us in the Law to condemn women like this to death by stoning. What have you to say?' They asked him this as a test, looking for something to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. As they persisted with their question, he looked up and said, 'If there is one of you who has not sinned, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.' Then he bent down and wrote on the ground again.

When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained standing there. He looked up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?'

'No one, sir,' she replied.

'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus 'go away, and don't sin any more.'

## **Second Reading**

The phrase that today's reading from Paul's letter to the Philippians brings to mind is "a work in progress." That's the essence of what Paul is saying about himself and what he wants the Philippians to emulate. He has discovered something of supreme importance and it has revolutionised his life. But securing this discovery once and for all is not yet complete.

What Paul has discovered – or more correctly, what has been revealed to him – is nothing less than the person of Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. He describes himself as being "captured" by Christ. Like anyone falling completely in love, all Paul wants to do is to know Christ and be known by him. That means modelling his life unreservedly on Jesus' self-sacrifice.

In no way has Paul come to know Christ by his own efforts. That has been God's gift. But ensuring that this grace takes full possession of him calls for the determination of the athlete. The ultimate prize in the race of life is the crown of eternal glory. This text is shot through with Paul's transformed zeal. There is no mistaking his passion for life in Christ. While the sentences are relatively long, Paul's thought is clear and sustained from start to finish. Readers should rise to the occasion and deliver this text with Paul's own fervour.

## **Gospel**

A woman humiliated in public, an absent accomplice, authorities baying for blood, and an unarmed defender. These are the characters in today's gospel story. Also in play are judgement, sexism, anger and self-righteousness, all ultimately undone by mercy, wisdom and compassion.

This short story is presumed to have migrated at some stage from Luke to the gospel of John. It could well have prefaced Luke's account of the passion, as the introduction to the story in John 8:1-2 is a close parallel of Luke 21:37-38. This makes it a fitting choice for the Sunday before Holy Week.

The story assumes the truth of the allegation, but the authorities' appeal to the Law is partial. In the case of adultery, both parties were to be put to death by those who witnessed the offence (Lev 20:10; Dt 22:22). This makes the action of the authorities in using the never-named woman as bait, their reference to "women like this," and the absence of her fellow adulterer all the more reprehensible.

Jesus neither excuses nor blames her. He simply refuses to condemn her. His very posture – bending to the ground while she stood, looking up to her rather than down on her – suggests an intentional mark of respect, restoring her dignity. The simplicity of the story belies its powerful appeal.

## Concluding Prayer

### Prayer over the People (Fifth Sunday of Lent)

Bless, O Lord, your people,  
who long for the gift of your mercy,  
and grant that what, at your prompting, they desire  
they may receive by your generous gift.  
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 Prayer over the People for the Fifth Sunday of Lent,  
Roman Missal p. 283.)