

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

5th Sunday of Easter

Year C

15 May 2022



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us,
that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism
may, under your protective care, bear much fruit
and come to the joys of life eternal.

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's remarkable how matter-of-fact the reports of Paul's journeys in the Acts of the Apostles are. Today, for example, we're simply told that Paul and Barnabas travelled back to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch before passing through Pisidia to Pamphylia, Perga and Attalia, then sailing from there to Syrian Antioch. We're given no clues as to how physically demanding this travel was, yet the distances are daunting and surely the comforts few. Paul, however, does give a colourful personal account of his tribulations in his second letter to Corinth (11:16-33).

Here's an appreciation of Paul from scripture scholar N. T. Wright: "Paul's vision of a united and holy community, prayerful, rooted in the scriptural story of ancient Israel, facing social and political hostility but insisting on doing good to all people, especially the poor, would always be central. His relentless personal energy, his clarity and vulnerability, and his way with words provided the motor to drive this vision, and each generation will need a few who can imitate him. His towering intellectual achievement, a theological vision of the One God reshaped around Jesus and the spirit and taking on the wider world of philosophy, would provide the robust, necessary framework for it all" (*Paul: A Biography*, NY: HarperCollins, 2018, 429-30). A fine tribute indeed.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 14:21–27

Paul and Barnabas went back through Lystra and Iconium to Antioch. They put fresh heart into the disciples, encouraging them to persevere in the faith. ‘We all have to experience many hardships’ they said ‘before we enter the kingdom of God.’ In each of these churches they appointed elders, and with prayer and fasting they commended them to the Lord in whom they had come to believe.

They passed through Pisidia and reached Pamphylia. Then after proclaiming the word at Perga they went down to Attalia and from there sailed for Antioch, where they had originally been commended to the grace of God for the work they had now completed.

On their arrival they assembled the church and gave an account of all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith to the pagans.

First Reading

In contrast to the rejection that Paul and Barnabas experience from the Jewish communities in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, there is no mention of hostility in their next destination, the town of Derbe. In fact, in words that preface today’s reading, we are told their preaching there won them “a considerable number of disciples.” Perhaps they had learnt from their bitter experience to bypass the synagogue and take the good news directly to the Gentiles.

Derbe marks the end point of this inaugural, and their only joint, missionary journey. From there, as we hear today, they set out to return to their starting point, Syrian Antioch. Somewhat surprisingly, they choose to go back via the three towns where they had been opposed and even stoned. We are not told how much time had elapsed before their reappearance, but the situation appears to have changed dramatically. Each community of believers had become established enough to warrant the appointment of elders. This is the first reference to the emergence of organisational structure in the fledgling communities.

This reading is itself good news. It testifies to the expansion of the Christian way beyond the confines of the synagogue. In colloquial terms, the genie is out of the bottle. To read this text with the confidence and conviction it calls for, readers should first rehearse the correct pronunciation of the place names.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 144:8–13

R. I will praise your name for ever,
my king and my God.
or

R. Alleluia.

The Lord is kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
How good is the Lord to all,
compassionate to all his creatures. **R.**

All your creatures shall thank you, O Lord,
and your friends shall repeat their blessing.
They shall speak of the glory of your reign
and declare your might, O God,
to make known to men your mighty deeds
and the glorious splendour of your reign. **R.**

Yours is an everlasting kingdom;
your rule lasts from age to age. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

It isn’t obvious in translation, but in the original Hebrew the verses of Psalm 144/145 are arranged in alphabetical order. Another feature of this psalm is its integration of quotations from several other psalms. Not only that, but it cites God’s own words to Moses on the holy mount of Sinai. As the Lord passes mysteriously by, the divine voice is heard to say to Moses, “The Lord, the Lord, God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness” (Ex 34:8), words echoed in the first verse of the responsorial psalm.

The whole psalm is a confession of faith and praise from start to finish. The response, from the first verse of the psalm, establishes its character at the outset. We are invited to join the psalmist in celebrating God’s kindness, compassion, love, glory, might and everlasting rule.

Readers should find it a joy to lead the assembly in such a positive prayer. The only challenge they have is giving clear cues for the response to the six-line second verse and the two-line third verse. The right modulation of voice and a visual prompt should ensure there is no confusion.

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse 21:1–5

I, John, saw a new heaven and a new earth; the first heaven and the first earth had disappeared now, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, and the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, as beautiful as a bride all dressed for her husband. Then I heard a loud voice call from the throne, 'You see this city? Here God lives among men. He will make his home among them; they shall be his people, and he will be their God; his name is God-with-them. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; there will be no more death, and no more mourning or sadness. The world of the past has gone.'

Then the One sitting on the throne spoke: 'Now I am making the whole of creation new'.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 13:31–35

When Judas had gone Jesus said:

'Now has the Son of Man been glorified, and in him God has been glorified. If God has been glorified in him, God will in turn glorify him in himself, and will glorify him very soon. My little children, I shall not be with you much longer. I give you a new commandment: love one another; just as I have loved you, you also must love one another. By this love you have for one another, everyone will know that you are my disciples'.

Second Reading

From last Sunday to this, thirteen chapters of the Apocalypse/Revelation are skipped over. In keeping with the festive spirit of the Easter season, the Lectionary confines itself to passages that gleam with glory. The omitted chapters are characterised by turmoil, violence, vengeance and judgement, as well as great obscurity. They have been wisely passed over in silence.

The text for today is a tapestry of threads from both Old and New Testament writings. In a text never heard on a Sunday, Isaiah announces God's promise of a new heaven, a new earth, and a new Jerusalem (65:17-25). The image of a new Jerusalem, as beautiful as a bride, may bring to mind the fourth reading of the Paschal Vigil, from the prophet Isaiah. For his part Ezekiel declares that God will dwell with his people: "I will be their God and they shall be my people" (37:26). Hosea, among other prophets, speaks of God's relationship with the Chosen People in nuptial terms (2:1-24).

In the New Testament, Paul and the author of the letter to the Hebrews make reference to our heavenly homeland (Gal 4:36; Phil 3:20; Heb 11:14-16). This reading, with its abolition of death, tears, mourning and sadness, is among the options given by the Order of Christian Funerals, as is its counterpart, Isaiah's vision of the messianic banquet (25:6-12).

The weaving together of all these themes creates a beautiful work of art for us to engage with and for readers to present. They should proclaim this reading mindful of the author's aim – to encourage his readers to hold fast to their faith in Christ's victory over the world's dark powers.

Gospel

Today's gospel passage introduces the farewell discourse of Jesus. It follows two prior events. The first – the washing of feet and Jesus' bidding his disciples to do the same – exemplifies the command he is about to give them: "love one another, just as I have loved you." The second event is Jesus' disclosure of Judas' treachery, a blatant counter-example to the humble service Jesus has just modelled.

The impending betrayal makes the opening words of the gospel reading all the more striking. Judas has just disappeared into the night, yet Jesus says, "Now has the Son of Man been glorified." This juxtaposition of betrayal and glory is unsettling, yet it is all of a piece with John's account of Jesus' destiny. All that happens in the course of Jesus' passion and death is tinged with glory. Jesus remains supremely free; his being raised on the cross is already an exaltation.

The community for whom John wrote his gospel would have understood that, when Jesus issued his command to love as he had loved, he was not just speaking of the washing of feet but anticipating the loving self-sacrifice that was to be manifest on Calvary. The first part of this text, on glorification, may seem rather convoluted, but the instruction on love that follows is crystal clear.

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.)