

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

7 August 2022



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
whom, taught by the Holy Spirit,
we dare to call our Father,
bring, we pray, to perfection in our hearts
the spirit of adoption as your sons and daughters,
that we may merit to enter into the inheritance
which you have promised.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

“Sell your possessions and give alms. . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” Luke reports Jesus’ blunt bidding without qualification. Of the three synoptic evangelists, Luke issues the clearest warnings about the dangers of wealth. One might wonder what prompted him to be uniquely sensitive about the issue.

In his snapshots of the early Jerusalem community, he stresses how they sold their goods and shared the proceeds among themselves so that no-one was left in need (Acts 2:45, 4:34). These idealised portraits contrast sharply with the melodrama of Ananias and Sapphira who each dropped dead when accused of defrauding the community. No wonder, as Luke observes, “This made a profound impression on the whole Church and on all who heard it” (5:11)!

In his encyclical on human fellowship, *Fratelli tutti*, Pope Francis writes of “the common destination of created goods.” He quotes John Chrysostom – “Not to share our wealth with the poor is to rob them and take away their livelihood. The riches we possess are not our own, but theirs as well” – and Gregory the Great – “When we provide the needy with their basic needs, we are giving them what belongs to them, not to us” (#119). These words from long ago have not lost their punch.

A reading from the book of Wisdom 18:6–9

That night had been foretold to our ancestors, so that, once they saw what kind of oaths they had put their trust in, they would joyfully take courage. This was the expectation of your people, the saving of the virtuous and the ruin of their enemies; for by the same act with which you took vengeance on our foes you made us glorious by calling us to you. The devout children of worthy men offered sacrifice in secret and this divine pact they struck with one accord: that the saints would share the same blessings and dangers alike; and forthwith they had begun to chant the hymns of the fathers.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:1, 12, 18–20, 22

R. Happy the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

Ring out your joy to the Lord, O you just;
for praise is fitting for loyal hearts.

They are happy, whose God is the Lord,
the people he has chosen as his own. **R.**

The Lord looks on those who revere him,
on those who hope in his love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine. **R.**

Our soul is waiting for the Lord.
The Lord is our help and our shield.
May your love be upon us, O Lord,
as we place all our hope in you. **R.**

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews

11:1–2, 8–19

Only faith can guarantee the blessings that we hope for, or prove the existence of the realities that at present remain unseen. It was for faith that our ancestors were commended.

It was by faith that Abraham obeyed the call to set out for a country that was the inheritance given to him and his descendants, and that he set out without knowing where he was going. By faith he arrived, as a foreigner, in the Promised Land, and lived there as if in a strange country, with Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. They lived there in tents while he looked forward to a city founded, designed and built by God.

It was equally by faith that Sarah, in spite of being past the age, was made able to conceive, because she believed that he who had made the promise would be faithful to it. Because of this, there came from one man, and one who was already as good as dead himself, more descendants than could be counted, as many as the stars of heaven or the grains of sand on the seashore.

First Reading

A number of factors make this reading from the book of Wisdom difficult to follow. It has been plucked from a long section of the book inspired by the story of the plagues in Egypt. Several of the plagues are recalled in order to contrast the fate of the Egyptians with the salvation of the Israelites. The author presumes familiarity with the original account in the book of Exodus.

Secondly, the selected passage not only begins with no explanatory introduction, but continues to the end without clear indicators as to its background. Thirdly, it is written in high literary style, possibly by a Jewish scholar in Alexandria versed in Hebrew poetry and Greek philosophy.

The night referred to at the start is that on which the first-born of the Egyptians were slain and those of the Israelites spared. It was the night of the first Passover, when the devout “offered sacrifice in secret” and struck a “divine pact.” None of this is immediately clear; the language is allusive rather than indicative.

The last phrase – “the hymns of the fathers” – makes a fortuitous connection with the second reading in praise of ancestors Abraham and Sarah. The link with the gospel seems to have been prompted by Jesus’ advice that his disciples should be “dressed for action” as the Israelites were on the night of their deliverance.

Readers would do well to read the whole passage (18:5-19) from which this excerpt is taken. That will familiarise them both with its content and style. They will need to prepare this solemn text well and proclaim it with deliberate clarity if the assembly is to grasp its message.

Responsorial Psalm

God’s choice and deliverance of Israel, the story behind the first reading, is explicitly acknowledged in the response to the psalm. But Psalm 32/33 has broader horizons still. It’s a hymn of praise to God for creation, for the providential care of the whole of humanity, and for its future destiny. Nonetheless, as the selected verses make clear, it’s the “just” and “those who revere him” who have every reason to offer praise and thanksgiving.

The memory of God’s saving choice of Israel provides grounds for hope of deliverance from “death” and “famine.” There’s even a hint of the unknown that lies ahead “as we place all our hope in you.” If the first reading may have seemed somewhat foggy, the psalm is full of light. Its appeal is reflected in the frequent use made of it in the Lectionary.

Given its spirit, its plainness of language and its regular structure, proclaiming this psalm should be a pleasure for readers and a blessing for the congregation.

[All these died in faith, before receiving any of the things that had been promised, but they saw them in the far distance and welcomed them, recognising that they were only strangers and nomads on earth. People who use such terms about themselves make it quite plain that they are in search of their real homeland. They can hardly have meant the country they came from, since they had the opportunity to go back to it; but in fact they were longing for a better homeland, their heavenly homeland. That is why God is not ashamed to be called their God, since he has founded the city for them.]

It was by faith that Abraham, when put to the test, offered up Isaac. He offered to sacrifice his only son even though the promises had been made to him and he had been told: It is through Isaac that your name will be carried on. He was confident that God had the power even to raise the dead, and so, figuratively speaking, he was given back Isaac from the dead.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

12:32-48

Jesus said to his disciples: [‘There is no need to be afraid, little flock, for it has pleased your Father to give you the kingdom.]

‘Sell your possessions and give alms. Get yourselves purses that do not wear out, treasure that will not fail you, in heaven where no thief can reach it and no moth destroy it. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.]

‘See that you are dressed for action and have your lamps lit. Be like men waiting for their master to return from the wedding feast, ready to open the door as soon as he comes and knocks. Happy those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. I tell you solemnly, he will put on an apron, sit them down at table and wait on them. It may be in the second watch he comes, or in the third, but happy those servants if he finds them ready. You may be quite sure of this, that if the householder had known at what hour the burglar would come, he would not have let anyone break through the wall of his house. You too must stand ready, because the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.’

[Peter said, ‘Lord, do you mean this parable for us, or for everyone?’ The Lord replied, ‘What sort of steward, then, is faithful and wise enough for the master to place him over his household to give them their allowance of food at the proper time? Happy that servant if his master’s arrival finds him at this employment. I tell you truly, he will place him over everything he owns. But as for the servant who says to himself, “My master is taking his time coming”, and sets about beating the menservants and the maids, and eating and drinking and getting drunk, his master will come on a day he does not expect and at an hour he does not know. The master will cut him off and send him to the same fate as the unfaithful.]

‘The servant who knows what his master wants, but has not even started to carry out those wishes, will receive very many strokes of the lash. The one who did not know, but deserves to be beaten for what he has done, will receive fewer strokes. When a man has had a great deal given him, a great deal will be demanded of him; when a man has had a great deal given him on trust, even more will be expected of him.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Second Reading

There are two blocks of readings from the letter to the Hebrews. The first, a set of seven in Year B, covers chapters 1-10. The second, starting today, is a set of four from the remainder of the letter. The work’s author, recipients, date and place of composition remain a matter of scholarly conjecture.

Clearly it is a treatise (perhaps a homily) of high literary and rhetorical quality. Its apparent purpose was to encourage Jewish Christians not to lose faith. It presents Christ, divine and human, as the supreme high priest whose self-sacrifice has accomplished salvation once and for all. The entire letter presumes familiarity with both Jewish history and liturgical practice.

Today’s passage presents Abraham and Sarah and their descendants as paragons of faith. The faith they exemplify is described as guaranteeing “the blessings that we hope for” and as proof of “realities that at present remain unseen.” Abraham is commended for his faith in setting out for an unknown destination, Sarah for the faith that bore fruit in Isaac.

Pastoral reasons may favour choosing the shorter option which omits the rather complex reflection on Abraham’s descendants as well as the story of the sacrifice of Isaac. In any case, readers will need to take care to articulate the opening sentence with great clarity. It’s the foundation on which the whole reading rests.

Gospel

Luke places a good deal of Jesus’ teaching in the context of his journey to Jerusalem, but today he extends the horizon to the end-times when the “master,” the Son of Man, will return. First, however, in the longer version, there’s a brief passage that echoes last Sunday’s parable of the foolish rich man. The disciples are advised to “sell your possessions and give alms . . . For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” If this section is not read, the Sunday faithful will never hear the wisdom of this latter saying, as its counterpart in Matthew 6:21 never appears.

With Jesus’ story of the master and his servants, Luke seems to be striking a balance between expectations for an imminent parousia and the need to live in constant preparedness. The story itself is more encouraging than threatening. The servants who are ready and waiting for their master will find him reverse roles and wait on them. This appealing image might trigger associations with the washing of the feet in John.

The rest of the longer option is darker in tone. There is reference to violent and dissolute servants being cut off and sent to their fate and to lazy servants who will be whipped. Is Luke already aware of community leaders who have abused their positions of responsibility?

A judicious choice needs to be made between the longer and the shorter versions. The balance would certainly tip in favour of the shorter if the full second reading is read. One consideration may be that the critical warning – “the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” – forms the climax of the shorter text.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time I)

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

Amen.

May he let his face shine upon us
and show us his mercy.

Amen.

May he turn his countenance towards us
and give us his peace.

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 I, Roman Missal p. 714)