

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Second Sunday of Lent

Year A

5 March 2023



### Collect

O God, who have commanded us  
to listen to your beloved Son,  
be pleased, we pray,  
to nourish us inwardly by your word,  
that, with spiritual sight made pure,  
we may rejoice to behold your glory.  
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 may be a remote association with the transfiguration, but the book of Exodus tells of Moses “going up” (Mt Sinai, presumably) with three companions, his brother Aaron and nephews Nadab and Abihu, plus seventy elders. There they “gazed on God” (24:11). When the time comes for Jesus to go up “a high mountain,” he too takes three companions, Peter, James and John, and there they gaze on glory.

This is the second time these companions are chosen to accompany Jesus. The first was the raising of the daughter of Jairus, the synagogue official. Curiously, Mark and Luke name the trio (Mk 5 :37; Lk 8:51) but Matthew makes no reference to their presence (9:25). The third and final time that Jesus has them accompany him is the agony in the garden (Mt 26:37). Having witnessed Jesus’ power over death and then his heavenly glory, the sight of him in such deep distress must have been traumatic. No wonder they took refuge in sleep.

Our companionship of Jesus may not reach such heights or plumb such depths, but is sure to have its highs and lows – moments when we glimpse the beauty of grace, and moments when we feel dark and lost. At times like that, Peter, James and John are our companions too.

## A reading from the book of Genesis 12:1–4

The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your family and your father's house, for the land I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name so famous that it will be used as a blessing.

'I will bless those who bless you:  
I will curse those who slight you.  
All the tribes of the earth  
shall bless themselves by you.'

So Abram went as the Lord told him.

## First Reading

With this passage from the book of Genesis we move from the great myths of the first eleven chapters – creation, the fall, Cain and Abel, the flood and the tower of Babel – to a more historical style of narrative. The figure of Abram emerges from obscurity and takes centre stage. Matthew makes him the first ancestor of Jesus; Luke, by contrast, traces Jesus' lineage back to Adam.

After the turmoil of the preceding chapters, the story of Abram's call is strikingly peaceful and positive. His call to migrate is full of promise. God will bless him with fame, a people and a land, and he will become a blessing for all nations. Abram obeys without question. The faith with which he responds is commended in the letter to the Hebrews (11:8) and is invoked at greater length in Paul's letter to the Romans (4:1–25).

The story defies modern desires for empirical historical data. Our questions about Abram, his place and time are unanswerable. What matters is the interplay between divine providence and human consent that gave birth to the Chosen People. The reading is simple yet solemn. It's a foundational text and should be delivered with gravity. Readers need to take care to say "Abram" and not "Abraham".

## Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:4–5, 18–20, 22

**R.** Lord, let your mercy be on us,  
as we place our trust in you.

The word of the Lord is faithful  
and all his works to be trusted.

The Lord loves justice and right  
and fills the earth with his love. **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.**

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 32/33 is an expansive hymn of praise for the God who has created all things and who guides the course of human history. Different sections of the psalm have been extracted and re-united to form the responsorial psalm. The very last sentence of the psalm serves as the response. It invokes the Lord's "mercy," also rendered as "love" or "steadfast love". For the psalmist, and for Israel, this is the fundamental divine trait that elicits complete trust.

The psalm has been composed as a communal prayer. In a sense it generalises the faith of Abram and extends it to the whole people. As promised, they are blessed by his willingness to trust God's word, to revere God, and to put all his hope in God's love. They have made his stance their own.

The entire psalm is pervaded by a spirit of confident and thankful faith. Looked at in isolation, the response could be seen as a plea for help, but in context it is a serene expression of trust and should be proclaimed as such. As always with a two-part response, readers will need to convey with their tone of voice and a pause that there is a second line to follow the first.

**A reading from the second letter of St Paul to Timothy** 1:8–10

With me, bear the hardships for the sake of the Good News, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy – not because of anything we ourselves have done but for his own purpose and by his own grace. This grace had already been granted to us, in Christ Jesus, before the beginning of time, but it has only been revealed by the Appearing of our saviour Christ Jesus. He abolished death, and he has proclaimed life and immortality through the Good News.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew** 17:1–9

Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain where they could be alone. There in their presence he was transfigured; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Suddenly Moses and Elijah appeared to them; they were talking with him. Then Peter spoke to Jesus. 'Lord,' he said 'it is wonderful for us to be here; if you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' He was still speaking when suddenly a bright cloud covered them with shadow, and from the cloud there came a voice which said, 'This is my Son, the Beloved; he enjoys my favour. Listen to him'. When they heard this, the disciples fell on their faces, overcome with fear. But Jesus came up and touched them. 'Stand up,' he said 'do not be afraid.' And when they raised their eyes they saw no one but only Jesus.

As they came down from the mountain Jesus gave them this order. 'Tell no one about the vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead.'

**Second Reading**

This short excerpt from Paul's second letter to Timothy (widely regarded as having been written by a later author in Paul's name) offers a short summary of the gospel. The mystery of God's eternal plan of salvation has been revealed and realised in Jesus Christ. Death has been abolished and immortal life bestowed. All this has been accomplished by the grace and power of God, not by human works.

The passage casts a glance back at Abram who put his faith in God and set out for a new life and land. It also hints at the gospel story of the transfiguration with the phrase "revealed by the Appearing of our saviour Jesus Christ".

The original purpose of this text, and of the letter as a whole, is to encourage Timothy. It seems he is facing challenges in his ministry of church leadership. Paul never hesitates to remind his readers of all the hardships he personally endured in the service of the gospel, though he doesn't spell them out here. Readers have the opportunity here to extend the encouragement that Paul gives Timothy to the gathered assembly. They will do this well if they proclaim the text with strength, a positive tone and due deliberation.

**Gospel**

Matthew introduced Jesus as a new Moses at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. Moses went up Mt Sinai to receive the Law, then came down from the heights to deliver it to the people. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus goes up a mountain (rather than a hill) to present his authoritative interpretation of the Law to the people. With the story of the transfiguration, Matthew makes the comparison more explicit. Aspects of the transfiguration such as the mountain, the voice from heaven, the cloud and a glorious appearance all feature in the stories of Moses in the book of Exodus (eg 34:29-35).

But the transfiguration reveals much more about Jesus' identity. He is the heavenly Son of Man who is prophesied in Daniel (7:13) and affirmed in the book of Revelation (1:13). He is re-affirmed as the Beloved Son of God, the words with which he was addressed at his baptism.

This episode is rich with other biblical allusions. In the Old Testament there's the mysterious figure of Elijah, the tent of meeting on the exodus journey, and the suffering servant. In the New there's the role of Peter, James and John in other events such as the agony in the garden. Jesus' rebuff of Peter's desire to stay on the mountain brings to mind the hymn from Philipians (2:6-11). Jesus did not cling to heavenly glory but accepted earthly death, even on the cross.

This marvellous and mysterious event deserves a faith-filled proclamation. Its blend of narrative, dialogue and action offers the minister of the word the opportunity to lead the assembly into the disciples' luminous experience.

## Concluding Prayer

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

Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord,  
with a blessing that endures for ever,  
and keep us faithful  
to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son,  
so that we may always desire and at last attain  
that glory whose beauty he showed in his own Body,  
to the amazement of his Apostles.  
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 Second Sunday of Lent,  
Roman Missal p. 252)