

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

6th Sunday of Easter

Year A

14 May 2023



Collect

Grant, almighty God,
that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion these days of joy,
which we keep in honour of the risen Lord,
and that what we relive in remembrance
we may always hold to in what we do.
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

One of the most wonderful moments in the celebration of the paschal mystery occurs at the start of the Easter Vigil. The great candle has been lit from the Easter fire. It heads the procession into the darkened church. Once inside, it's astonishing to see how much light that single candle can shed, before the others are lit and the space becomes a forest of flame.

Light and darkness are at play in Jesus' farewell discourse. It begins with the departure of Judas from the supper. In an immensely powerful phrase, John simply says: "It was night" (13:30). When the discourse finally ends, Jesus departs with his disciples into the shadows of the night. Framed by darkness, Jesus' prayerful reflections with his disciples suggest the image of a candle illuminating not just their faces but their hearts.

After all this time, Jesus' words still have the power to kindle hope and love in our hearts. They are deceptively simple yet deeply mysterious. Only in those who take the time to ponder them will their profound promise be fulfilled.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles
8:5–8, 14–17

Philip went to a Samaritan town and proclaimed the Christ to them. The people united in welcoming the message Philip preached, either because they had heard of the miracles he worked or because they saw them for themselves. There were, for example, unclean spirits that came shrieking out of many who were possessed, and several paralytics and cripples were cured. As a result there was great rejoicing in that town.

When the apostles in Jerusalem heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, and they went down there, and prayed for the Samaritans to receive the Holy Spirit, for as yet he had not come down on any of them: they had only been baptised in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.

Responsorial Psalm **Ps 65:1–7, 16, 20**

R. Let all the earth cry out to God with joy.
or

R. Alleluia.

Cry out with joy to God all the earth,
O sing to the glory of his name.
O render him glorious praise.

Say to God: 'How tremendous your deeds! **R.**

'Before you all the earth shall bow;
shall sing to you, sing to your name!
Come and see the works of God,
tremendous his deeds among men. **R.**

He turned the sea into dry land,
they passed through the river dry-shod.
Let our joy then be in him;
he rules for ever by his might. **R.**

Come and hear, all who fear God.
I will tell what he did for my soul:
Blessed be God who did not reject my prayer
nor withhold his love from me. **R.**

First Reading

Multiple events have taken place between last Sunday's reading and this. Stephen, one of the seven chosen to give out food to the Greek-speaking widows in Jerusalem, has turned out to be a miracle-worker and eloquent preacher. In short, this leads to his arrest and stoning to death, with Saul (yet to become Paul) as an approving witness. The persecution that ensues impels another of the seven, this time Philip, to take the good news out of Jerusalem to Samaria. With this a new phase of the Christian mission begins.

Like Stephen, Philip engages in preaching and works of healing. These lead many Samaritans to be baptised "in the name of the Lord Jesus". The distinction Luke makes between this baptism and receiving the Holy Spirit is unusual. Presumably he is wanting to stress the validation of Philip's ministry by the apostles. His constant concern is to show how the growth of the Christian movement is so Spirit-impelled that murder and persecution serve only as a catalyst, not a barrier, to its progress.

None of that violent background is evident in the reading. From start to finish it is buoyed by the spirit of the good news. Readers have every reason to enjoy proclaiming it.

Responsorial Psalm

While the momentum of the first reading is forward-looking, Psalm 65/66 looks back in joyful remembrance. The psalmist recalls the marvellous work of God in delivering the Israelites from Egypt. This is not an exercise in nostalgia. It's an incentive for present praise on the part of the whole community.

This is the tenor of the first half of the psalm. The second half is the prayer of an individual who has been saved from distress. This person gives thanks and praise for deliverance and proffers this as a motive for others to join in.

The first three verses of the responsorial psalm come from the earlier part and are entirely sunny in spirit. The final verse comes from the latter, more shaded, part. Its call for praise alludes to the deliverance the psalmist has experienced but gives no information about it. Whatever it was remains in the background.

Overall the psalm is in the same positive key as the first reading. It invites the reader to lead the assembly through this prayer with a spirit of joyful faith.

A reading from the first letter of St Peter

3:15–18

Reverence the Lord Christ in your hearts, and always have your answer ready for people who ask you the reason for the hope that you all have. But give it with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience, so that those who slander you when you are living a good life in Christ may be proved wrong in the accusations that they bring. And if it is the will of God that you should suffer, it is better to suffer for doing right than for doing wrong.

Why, Christ himself, innocent though he was, had died once for sins, died for the guilty, to lead us to God. In the body he was put to death, in the spirit he was raised to life.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

14:15–21

Jesus said to his disciples:

'If you love me you will keep my commandments. I shall ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you for ever, that Spirit of truth whom the world can never receive since it neither sees nor knows him; but you know him, because he is with you, he is in you. I will not leave your orphans; I will come back to you. In a short time the world will no longer see me; but you will see me, because I live and you will live. On that day you will understand that I am in my Father and you in me and I in you. Anybody who receives my commandments and keeps them will be one who loves me; and anybody who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I shall love him and show myself to him.'

Second Reading

The first letter of Peter was written to encourage Christians who felt rejected or regarded with suspicion by their fellow citizens. On the one hand, as we hear today, the author advises them to stay strong and accept their suffering after the example of Christ. On the other, the letter's recipients are cautioned not to antagonise their accusers. They are called to testify to their beliefs thoughtfully and calmly. There is a good dose of common sense here. The community is exhorted to avoid behaviour that might bring them to the attention of Roman authorities and create difficulties.

The passage concludes with what seems like part of a confession of faith. What follows after it is an obscure passage that has not been included in the lectionary. The major part of the reading is thus wise advice culminating in a credal statement. Readers should lead the assembly thoughtfully through the text before proclaiming the conclusion with strong conviction. This is the last excerpt from 1 Peter for the Easter season.

Gospel

Apart from a couple of intervening verses, today's gospel picks up from where last Sunday's left off. It continues Jesus' intimate imparting of wisdom to his inner circle. The whole discourse can be seen as an elaboration of the last verse of the prologue to John's gospel: "No one has ever seen God; it is the Son, who is nearest the Father's heart, who has made him known" (1:18).

In the process of making God known to his disciples, Jesus now talks of another who will reveal the mystery of divine love to the disciples. The Paraclete (known by this name only in John) is presented at different times as defence lawyer, counsellor, helper and comforter, all of which have their import. This Spirit of Truth (another unique title in John) will help them understand the meaning of Jesus' departure and the paradox of his continuing presence. He will dwell in them and they in him.

Jesus' words are simple yet profound. Those who minister them to the assembly have the privilege of ushering their hearers into the holy of holies that is the communion of love between Father, Son and Spirit. This is a reading that calls for a relatively slow and meditative delivery that is also strongly affirmative. We will return to the gospel of John for a final passage on Pentecost Sunday.

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.)