

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Pentecost Sunday

Year A

28 May 2023



### Collect

O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast  
sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation,  
pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
across the face of the earth  
and, with the divine grace that was at work  
when the Gospel was first proclaimed,  
fill now once more the hearts of believers.  
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

"Spirit-filled evangelisers means evangelisers fearlessly open to the working of the Holy Spirit". So Pope Francis begins the final chapter of his manifesto, *The Joy of the Gospel*. What is the good news that Spirit-filled evangelisers proclaim? Paul, writing to the Corinthians, condenses it in the simplest of phrases: "Jesus is Lord!"

Francis expands on this. "Christ's resurrection is not an event of the past; it contains a vital power which has permeated this world. . . It is an irresistible force. Often it seems that God does not exist: all around us we see persistent injustice, evil, indifference and cruelty. But it is also true that in the midst of darkness something new always springs to life . . .

"However dark things are, goodness always re-emerges and spreads. Each day in our world beauty is born anew, it rises transformed through the storms of history. . . Such is the power of the resurrection, and all who evangelise are instruments of that power." (#276)

## **A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 2:1–11**

When Pentecost day came round, the apostles had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. 'Surely' they said 'all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome – Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.'

## **First Reading**

When God called Moses and the Israelites into covenant at Mt Sinai, awe-inspiring phenomena accompanied the event. Thunder, lightning, cloud, smoke, fire and a thunderous trumpet all testified to God's might and majesty. The descent of the Spirit on the apostles in Jerusalem is also marked by impressive signs – tongues of fire, a powerful and noisy wind, and a language epiphany.

The apostles were being "clothed with the power from on high" and "baptised with the Holy Spirit" just as Jesus had promised (Lk 24:49; Acts 1:5). Obedient to his command, they had stayed in the city and prayed in the upper room "together with several women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers" (Acts 1:14).

They were not alone in Jerusalem. Jewish pilgrims from all parts of the diaspora had come to the city to celebrate the autumn harvest festival of Pentecost and commemorate the Sinai covenant and the giving of the Mosaic Law. This feast and much else in the Jewish tradition, such as creation, Babel and the oracles of the prophets, forms the backdrop to this new event.

Readers will see what a privilege it is to proclaim a text that gathers such a history to itself and inaugurates a new era, that of the Church and its world-wide mission. They will also recognise they will have to be sure about the pronunciation of all the proper names. This is not a reading that should be marred by hesitation or mispronunciations. It should be delivered with energy and conviction.

## **Responsorial Psalm Ps 103:1, 24, 29–31, 34**

**R.** Lord, send out your Spirit  
and renew the face of the earth.  
or

**R.** Alleluia.

Bless the Lord, my soul!  
Lord God, how great you are,  
How many are your works, O Lord!  
The earth is full of your riches. **R.**

You take back your spirit, they die,  
returning to the dust from which they came.  
You send forth your spirit, they are created;  
and you renew the face of the earth. **R.**

May the glory of the Lord last for ever!  
May the Lord rejoice in his works!  
May my thoughts be pleasing to him.  
I find my joy in the Lord. **R.**

## **Responsorial Psalm**

The responsorial psalm for the Pentecost day Mass, like that for the vigil, is a selection of verses from Psalm 103/104, a lengthy hymn of praise for God as Creator. The psalm has much in common with the Genesis creation story, the first reading at the Paschal Vigil. Thus it links the beginning and end of the Easter season. It is also similar to an ancient Egyptian hymn to the sun. References in the second stanza to the spirit that creates, sustains and renews life forge the connection with the feast of Pentecost. The response, taken from this verse and turned into a petition, keeps the Spirit at the forefront of our minds. This is an uplifting prayer that calls forth admiration, wonder and praise. It invites us to relinquish an instrumental attitude to creation and replace it with appreciation. Readers have two things to be ready for. One is the announcement of the two-line response. An upward inflection on "Spirit" and a moment's pause will alert the assembly to wait for the second part of the response. The other is the brevity of the lines in the first stanza. This should not tempt the reader into turning the poetry into prose. This psalm should be a joy for readers to proclaim.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Corinthians**  
**12:3–7, 12–13**

No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.

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

**20:19–23**

In the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,  
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.  
For those whose sins you forgive,  
they are forgiven;  
for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

**Second Reading**

Paul's letters are often prompted by problems that have arisen in his communities. The happy outcome of this is the teaching that he expounds in response. Today's reading is a case in point, though it gives no clue as to the particular issue Paul is addressing – the disruptive and divisive role of the gift of tongues. This only becomes clear later in the letter.

One of the revolutionary features of the Christian movement was the way it transcended conventional social distinctions and barriers. Baptism and the gifts of the Spirit were given freely to all, regardless of race and status (and gender, Gal 3:28). Paul reminds the Corinthians that whatever gift they enjoy is not a personal possession or achievement but the work of the Spirit.

The countercultural social unity of the Christian community was put in jeopardy by the Corinthians prizing one gift above another and losing sight of their common purpose, to build up the body of Christ. Paul's use of the body metaphor to demonstrate diversity and unity is not unique; it was common in the ancient world. He simply adopts and Christianises it.

Today's text makes no reference to the problematic issues Paul is dealing with. It is wholly affirmative. Readers have the pleasure of proclaiming this appealing text on a splendidly festive day.

**Gospel**

Today's gospel is the first part of the lengthy passage we hear every year on the Second Sunday of Easter. As was observed then, no two gospels recount Jesus' post-resurrection appearances in the same way, but all four agree on one thing. Women are the first witnesses and none of them are believed. In John, it's Mary of Magdala who fulfils her commission to tell the disciples of her encounter with the risen Lord (20:18) in vain. In spite of her testimony, as the very next verse of the gospel records, the disciples meet in fear behind closed doors.

Jesus appears among them and blesses them with peace. Peace is but one of the gifts which Jesus had spoken about with his disciples in the farewell discourse. Other blessings brought to realisation in this episode include the Spirit (14:16–17), friendship (15:14), joy (16:24), faith (17:8) and mission (17:18).

Just as God breathed life into the first human being (Gn 2:7), the Risen One breathes new life into the disciples. Born again in the Spirit, they are sent to share with the world the forgiveness they have just experienced for themselves. Word-wise, the great ninety days of Lent and Easter come to a close on a note of peace, joy and mercy. This is the uplifting spirit in which this text should be delivered.

## **Solemn Blessing – The Holy Spirit**

May God, the Father of lights,  
who was pleased to enlighten the disciples' minds  
by the outpouring of the Spirit, the Paraclete,  
grant us gladness by his blessing  
and make us always abound with the gifts of the same Spirit.  
**Amen.**

May the wondrous flame that appeared above the disciples,  
powerfully cleanse our hearts from every evil  
and pervade them with its purifying light.  
**Amen.**

And may God, who has been pleased to unite many tongues  
in the profession of one faith,  
give us perseverance in that same faith  
and, by believing, may we journey from hope to clear vision.  
**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 The Holy Spirit, Roman Missal p 714.)