

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

14 January 2024



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
who govern all things,
both in heaven and on earth,
mercifully hear the pleading of your people
and bestow your peace on our times.
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

Our Year B journey through Mark's gospel is a little patchy. We heard the opening verses, devoted to the preaching of John the Baptist, on the Second Sunday of Advent several weeks ago. The next few, Mark's account of Jesus' baptism, are naturally allocated to the feast of the Baptism of the Lord. The episode after that is the temptations of Jesus, which we always hear about on the Second Sunday of Lent. Finally, because Mark's is the shortest of the gospels, the lectionary makes up for the shortfall with several passages from John. Strangely enough, that means we hear the story of Simon and Andrew's call two Sundays in a row. It's John's version today, next week it's Mark's. Today we also begin a series of five readings from 1 Corinthians chapters 6-11. The first reading and psalm vary from Sunday to Sunday, as they are chosen in combination with the gospel.

A reading from the first book of Samuel

3:3–10, 19

Samuel was lying in the sanctuary of the Lord where the ark of God was, when the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' He answered, 'Here I am.' Then he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am, since you called me'. Eli said, 'I did not call. Go back and lie down.' So he went and lay down. Once again the Lord called, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, since you called me.' He replied, 'I did not call you, my son; go back and lie down.' Samuel had as yet no knowledge of the Lord and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him. Once again the Lord called, the third time. He got up and went to Eli and said, 'Here I am, since you called me.' Eli then understood that it was the Lord who was calling the boy, and he said to Samuel, 'Go and lie down, and if someone calls say, "Speak Lord, your servant is listening"'. So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord then came and stood by, calling as he had done before, 'Samuel! Samuel!' Samuel answered, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'

Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him and let no word of his fall to the ground.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 39:2, 4, 7–10

R. Here am I, Lord;
I come to do your will.

I waited, I waited for the Lord
and he stooped down to me;
he heard my cry.
He put a new song into my mouth,
praise of our God. **R.**

You do not ask for sacrifice and offerings,
but an open ear.
You do not ask for holocaust and victim.
Instead, here am I. **R.**

In the scroll of the book it stands written
that I should do your will.
My God, I delight in your law
in the depth of my heart. **R.**

Your justice I have proclaimed
in the great assembly.
My lips I have not sealed;
you know it, O Lord. **R.**

First Reading

In spite of its interesting connection with the births of John the Baptist and Jesus, the story of the prophet Samuel's birth is never told on a Sunday or feast day. That means we don't get to hear his mother Hannah's hymn of praise and thanks (1 Sam 2:1-10) for the gift of her son. It's remarkably similar to Mary's Magnificat. Hannah goes on to match her thanksgiving with action. She offers Samuel for God's service in the shrine at Shiloh where Eli was the priest and the ark of the covenant was housed. Today's reading picks up the story from there. Samuel hears a voice calling him and thinks it is Eli. Only on the third occasion does Eli realise it is the voice of God and advise Samuel to respond with the words, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." The lectionary text leapfrogs over the message that Samuel receives and concludes with the summary statement, "Samuel grew up and the Lord was with him." This brings a similar observation about the young Jesus to mind (Lk 2:52). In addition, Samuel's threefold "Here I am" is taken up in the psalm that follows and in the letter to the Hebrews (10:5-9). The story of Samuel's call is well-crafted. The author invites us to imagine the scene and be drawn into the action as it unfolds. Readers with story-telling skills will readily engage the assembly. The drama grows steadily with each of the three calls. The tension is not fully resolved because we don't hear God's words to Samuel. Instead, we are brought to earth somewhat abruptly by the report of Samuel's advance. Well-delivered, the reading will prepare us for the gospel account of Andrew and Simon Peter's first encounter with Jesus.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 39/40 is a fitting match for the story of Samuel's call. The response, "Here am I, Lord; I come to do your will," sets the tone immediately. It draws together Samuel's reply to Eli, "Here I am," and his response to God, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening." The psalm as a whole is a pithy blend of themes from the prophets, the wisdom writers and other psalms.

Each of the four stanzas of the responsorial psalm has its own character. The first is rooted in the psalmist's experience of being saved from a desperate situation. God has not only heard and acted on the psalmist's plea, but has added the gift of praise. The second sums up a core teaching of the prophets. Self-offering in obedience to God's word takes priority over the offering of sacrifices. This verse is cited in the letter to the Hebrews (10:5-7) and applied to Christ's self-sacrifice on the cross. The third stanza echoes Psalm 118/119, the longest of the psalms, in its praise of the Law as God's life-giving word. In the fourth and final stanza, the psalmist makes the bold claim of having testified faithfully before the assembled community.

Right from the start, the assembly is asked to plunge in and make the servant's unequivocal pledge their own. For this to happen the words of the response must be clearly proclaimed. An upward inflection at the end of the first phrase will allow for a pause before the second. Together the two parts form an emphatic declaration. Readers will also need to take care with the five-line first stanza.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians 6:13–15, 17–20**

The body is not meant for fornication; it is for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. God who raised the Lord from the dead, will by his power raise us up too.

You know, surely, that your bodies are members making up the body of Christ; anyone who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with him.

Keep away from fornication. All the other sins are committed outside the body; but to fornicate is to sin against your own body. Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God. You are not your own property; you have been bought and paid for. That is why you should use your body for the glory of God.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to John 1:35–42**

As John stood with two of his disciples, Jesus passed, and John stared hard at him and said, 'Look, there is the lamb of God.' Hearing this, the two disciples followed Jesus. Jesus turned round, saw them following and said, 'What do you want?' They answered, 'Rabbi,' - which means Teacher - 'where do you live?' 'Come and see' he replied; so they went and saw where he lived, and stayed with him the rest of that day. It was about the tenth hour.

One of these two who became followers of Jesus after hearing what John had said was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. Early next morning, Andrew met his brother and said to him, 'We have found the Messiah' - which means the Christ - and he took Simon to Jesus. Jesus looked hard at him and said, 'You are Simon son of John; you are to be called Cephas' - meaning Rock.

Second Reading

After the edifying story of Samuel, followed by a devout psalm, it's nothing short of shocking to be confronted with the stern admonition that opens the second reading, "The body is not meant for fornication." Paul will go on to say something quite wonderful – "Your body, you know, is the temple of the Holy Spirit" – but this may not be heard after his moral strictures.

Today's reading is the first of five from chapters 6-11 of 1 Corinthians. We hear from chapters 1-4 in Year A, and on every Easter Sunday there's the option of a few verses from chapter 5. Now, without warning, we are plunged into Paul's severe censure of the community. In passages we never hear he has addressed scandals in the community: an incestuous relationship and recourse to pagan courts to resolve an internal dispute. Today he condemns sexual immorality in the form of fornication with prostitutes (though the explicit reference to prostitutes in v. 16 is omitted).

At first blush, with his references to "spirit" and "Holy Spirit," Paul may seem to be altogether disapproving of the body and of sexual behaviour. This overlooks his repeated recognition of the body. What matters is how the body is used. Paul's point is that it must be "for the glory of God." He wants the Corinthians to understand that together they form the body of Christ in which the Spirit of God dwells. They should live accordingly.

Readers may be tempted to try and soften the bluntness of Paul's language, but this would do the word of God and the assembly a disservice. The reader's task, as always, is to ensure that, whatever the word of the day is, it is proclaimed as faithfully and intelligibly as possible.

Gospel

In the synoptic gospels, Jesus summons the disciples to follow him. John begins with a different perspective. After the Baptist has testified that Jesus is "the lamb of God" and "the Chosen One of God" (1:29.34), two of his disciples are intrigued enough to seek Jesus out and spend time with him. When questioned about what they want, Jesus bids them come and see where he lives. His invitation is like that of Wisdom urging people to come to her house and sup with her (Prov 9:1-6). Jesus will say later than no-one can come to him unless drawn by the Father (6:44).

We learn that one of these two disciples is Andrew. The other remains unidentified. Andrew persuades his brother Simon Peter to come and find Jesus. This leads to reciprocal recognition. Having "dwelt" for a time with Jesus, Andrew declares him to be the Messiah. For his part, Jesus looks hard at Simon (just as the Baptist had stared at Jesus) and names him Cephas or Rock.

The episode is simply told but this belies the wealth of meaning embedded in it. There are titles and names to be unpacked, and its themes of witness, dwelling, truth and wisdom to be explored. It is a thoughtful text with which to commence our way through Ordinary Time.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

SECOND SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first book of Samuel

3:3–10, 19

Samuel was lying down in the temple of the Lord,
where the ark of God was.
Then the Lord called, "Samuel! Samuel!"
and he said, "Here I am!"
Samuel ran to Eli, and said,
"Here I am, for you called me."
But Eli said, "I did not call; lie down again."
So he went and lay down.
The Lord called again, "Samuel!"
Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said,
"Here I am, for you called me."
But he said,
"I did not call, my son; lie down again."
Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord,
and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him.
The Lord called Samuel again, a third time.
And he got up and went to Eli, and said,
"Here I am, for you called me."
Then Eli perceived that the Lord was calling the boy.
Therefore Eli said to Samuel,
"Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say,
'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"
So Samuel went and lay down in his place.
Now the Lord came and stood there,
calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!"
And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening."
As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him
and let none of his words fall to the ground.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians

6:13–15, 17–20

The body is meant not for fornication but for the Lord,
and the Lord for the body.
And God raised the Lord and will also raise us by his power.
Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ?
But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.
Shun fornication!
Every sin that a person commits is outside the body;
but the fornicator sins against the body itself.
Or do you not know
that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you,
which you have from God,
and that you are not your own?
For you were bought with a price;
therefore glorify God in your body.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 1:35–42

John was standing with two of his disciples,
and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed,
"Look, here is the Lamb of God!"

The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus.

When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them,
"What are you looking for?"

They said to him, "Rabbi"
(which translated means Teacher),
"where are you staying?"

He said to them, "Come and see."

They came and saw where he was staying,
and they remained with him that day.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon.

One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew,
Simon Peter's brother.

He first found his brother Simon and said to him,
"We have found the Messiah"

(which is translated Anointed).

He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said,
"You are Simon son of John.

You are to be called Cephas"
(which is translated Peter).

Concluding Prayer

Blessing for the Beginning of the New Year

May God, the source and origin of all blessing,
grant us grace,
pour out his blessing in abundance,
and keep us safe from harm throughout the year.

Amen.

May he give us integrity in the faith,
endurance in hope,
and perseverance in charity
with holy patience to the end.

Amen.

May he order our days and our deeds in his peace,
grant our prayers in this and in every place,
and lead us happily to eternal life.

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 Beginning of the Year, Roman Missal p 710)