

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

11 February 2024



### Collect

O God, who teach us that you abide  
in hearts that are just and true,  
grant that we may be so fashioned by your grace  
as to become a dwelling pleasing to you.  
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

We can thank the Corinthians' rather chaotic community life, with its factions, charisms and questions, for provoking Paul to write at some length to them. One of the issues he has to reprimand and educate them about was table fellowship. Sadly, much of his teaching on this subject in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 is never heard on a Sunday. Paul upbraids them for betraying the import of the Lord's Supper. Rivalries abound, wealth and status divide the members, and sharing is shoved aside by selfishness and indulgence. What should have been a powerful display of equality, mutuality and selflessness had become the opposite. The Corinthians are failing to honour the Body of Christ. It didn't take long for the early Church to separate the Lord's Supper from the common meal, and this is what we have inherited. Our issues may be different, but Paul's critique still has bite.

## A reading from the book of Leviticus 13:1–2, 44–46

The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'If a swelling or scab or shiny spot appears on a man's skin, a case of leprosy of the skin is to be suspected. The man must be taken to Aaron, the priest, or to one of the priests who are his sons.

'The man is leprosy: he is unclean. The priest must declare him unclean; he is suffering from leprosy of the head. A man infected with leprosy must wear his clothing torn and his hair disordered; he must shield his upper lip and cry, "Unclean, unclean." As long as the disease lasts he must be unclean; and therefore he must live apart; he must live outside the camp.'

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 31:1–2, 5, 11

**R.** I turn to you, Lord, in time of trouble,  
and you fill me with the joy of salvation.

Happy the man whose offence is forgiven,  
whose sin is remitted.

○ happy the man to whom the Lord  
imputes no guilt,  
in whose spirit is no guile. **R.**

But now I have acknowledged my sins;  
my guilt I did not hide.

I said: 'I will confess  
my offence to the Lord.'

And you, Lord, have forgiven  
the guilt of my sin. **R.**

Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord,  
exult, you just!

○ come, ring out your joy,  
all you upright of heart. **R.**

## First Reading

It's safe to say that chapters 11-15 of the book of Leviticus are rarely read for inspiration. They set out regulations about dealing with what is clean and unclean. They cover animals, diseases, sex and birth. Today's reading is a short extract from chapters 13-14 which deal at length and in detail with a wide variety of skin diseases.

Community concern about such diseases was twofold. The first was the risk of spreading infection. The second was the associated problem of ritual impurity. Contact with an infected person made one unclean and thus disqualified from participation in the worship life of the community. As a result, the prescribed measure was to isolate infected persons until their condition had cleared and they could be judged clean by the priests. The underlying issue was maintenance of the boundaries that defined Israel as a people.

The generic term used for skin diseases, both in the Old and New Testaments, was leprosy. This is now understood to mean many more afflictions than leprosy proper. Readers may find this text unappealing, even unpleasant, but it paves the way for the gospel story. They should not shy away from proclaiming it with the authority that befits the Mosaic Law. They will see that there is an awkward transition between the two paragraphs because the reading combines verses from two separate places in the chapter. This is less the case in the NRSV lectionary which also renders the text inclusively.

## Responsorial Psalm

The scriptures present a complex picture of the relationship between sickness and sin. Jesus' repudiation of a causal connection (John 9:3) is exceptional. The choice of today's psalm reinforces the more common assumption that sin and sickness are indeed inter-related. The first reading was about the sickness of leprosy. It caused ritual uncleanness but with no suggestion of moral guilt. The psalm however is explicitly about sin, repentance and forgiveness. Its use clearly implies that sickness occurs as a result of sin.

Psalm 31/32 is commonly identified as one of seven psalms that the early Christian Church named "penitential." It's a song of thanksgiving from one who has experienced God's forgiveness of sin. The response, however, is more general. It refers neither to sin nor sickness but to a "time of trouble." It will require careful proclamation, as it is composed of two phrases that make for a lengthy unit. An upward inflexion on the word "trouble" before a moment's pause will alert the assembly that there's more to come. It may help if the reader repeats the response in unison with the congregation.

The selected verses vary in character. The first is a third-person declaration. The second begins as a first-person statement then becomes an address to God. The third is an exhortation addressed to the people. Readers would do well to examine these variations and adjust their style of proclamation accordingly. Of course, whatever the internal variations, all psalms are poem-prayers and should be voiced as such.

The language itself is straightforward enough, though the majority of the lines are short and care needs to be taken not to rush them. The text could be rendered inclusive by replacing "man" with "one".

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul  
to the Corinthians 10:31 – 11:1**

Whatever you eat, whatever you drink, whatever you do at all, do it for the glory of God. Never do anything offensive to anyone - to Jews or Greeks or to the Church of God; just as I try to be helpful to everyone at all times, not anxious for my own advantage but for the advantage of everybody else, so that they may be saved.

Take me for your model, as I take Christ.

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Mark 1:40–45**

A leper came to Jesus and pleaded on his knees: 'If you want to' he said 'you can cure me.' Feeling sorry for him, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him. 'Of course I want to!' he said. 'Be cured!' And the leprosy left him at once and he was cured. Jesus immediately sent him away and sternly ordered him, 'Mind you say nothing to anyone, but go and show yourself to the priest, and make the offering for your healing prescribed by Moses as evidence of your recovery.' The man went away, but then started talking about it freely and telling the story everywhere, so that Jesus could no longer go openly into any town, but had to stay outside in places where nobody lived. Even so, people from all around would come to him.

**Second Reading**

With today's reading Paul brings to a close his lengthy response to the Corinthians' question about eating meat offered to idols. His practical advice, prior to this passage, is that believers should feel free to eat whatever is set before them, provided this does not offend someone with a more sensitive conscience. "There are no forbidden things," he wrote, "but not everything does good" (10:23). It's a matter of balancing the exercise of one's freedom with the effect this has on others.

He concludes with a general principle. Do everything for the glory of God and don't offend anyone. He then returns to the point he had made earlier in the letter: "I have made myself the slave of everyone so as to win as many as I could" (9:19). He is determined to give priority to others' benefit over his own. Not being shy of offering his own behaviour as a model to be followed, here he sets that counsel in the context of his own imitation of Christ.

Apart from the very first verse, we hear nothing more from chapter 11 of this letter, except on Holy Thursday evening and on the feast of the Body and Blood of Christ when Paul's account of the Lord's Supper is read. He has other things of importance to say about the community's meal practice but they are not to be found in the Sunday lectionary.

Given that Paul is presenting a general conclusion here, the text should be delivered with positive authority and at a moderate pace.

**Gospel**

The reading from Leviticus has prepared us for this story of Jesus curing a leper. While he noted that Jesus' first healing and exorcism took place on the sabbath, in this case Mark offers no time clue. It's striking, though, that having taken liberties on the sabbath and having risked ritual defilement by touching the leper, Jesus insists, with some vehemence, that the cured man observe the prescriptions of the Law. He must validate his restored health with the priest and make the required offering.

The rather weak translation, "Feeling sorry for him," doesn't do justice to Jesus' depth of feeling at the sight of the man. In fact, Mark's account of the episode could imply that Jesus experienced great anger, perhaps because the man's leprosy was a manifestation of the powers that Jesus had to contend with, or perhaps because the publicity it was sure to generate would mislead the people about his messianic mission. The ironic outcome is that, having restored the man to the community, Jesus is forced into self-exclusion.

As we have come to expect, Mark provides us with an energy-charged report of Jesus' activity. It deserves to be delivered with animation.

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.

**SIXTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FIRST READING (NRSV)**

**A reading from the book of Leviticus** **13:1–2, 44–46**

The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying:  
"When a person has on the skin of the body  
a swelling or an eruption or a spot,  
and it turns into a leprous disease on the skin of the body,  
that person shall be brought to Aaron the priest  
or to one of his sons the priests.

"A person who has the leprous disease shall wear torn clothes  
and let the hair of the head be dishevelled  
and shall cover the upper lip and cry out,  
'Unclean, unclean.'

A person shall remain unclean as long as the disease persists;  
and being unclean, that person shall live alone  
with a dwelling outside the camp."

**SECOND READING (NRSV)**

**A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians** **10:31 – 11:1**

'Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do,  
do everything for the glory of God.  
Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks  
or to the church of God,  
just as I try to please everyone in everything I do,  
not seeking my own advantage, but that of many,  
so that they may be saved.  
Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

**GOSPEL (NRSV)**

**A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark** **1:40–45**

A man with leprosy came to Jesus begging him,  
and kneeling said to Jesus,  
"If you choose, you can make me clean."  
Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him,  
and said to him, "I do choose. Be made clean!"  
Immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.  
After sternly warning him Jesus sent him away at once,  
saying to him, "See that you say nothing to anyone;  
but go, show yourself to the priest,  
and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded,  
as a testimony to them."  
But the man went out and began to proclaim it freely,  
and to spread the word,  
and people came to Jesus from every quarter.

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time III)

May almighty God bless us in his kindness  
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

**Amen.**

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith  
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

**Amen.**

May he turn our steps towards himself  
and show us the path of charity and 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 III, Roman Missal p. 715)