

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Easter Sunday

Year B

31 March 2024



Collect

O God, who on this day,
through your Only Begotten Son,
have conquered death
and unlocked for us the path to eternity,
grant, we pray, that we who keep
the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection
may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit,
rise up in the light of life.
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 Lenten journey has come to completion. We accompanied Jesus all the way from the desert of temptation to his tomb. We had a sense of direction and the tension grew as we closed in on the city of Jerusalem. Now we have arrived and find that we have crossed a threshold into a different kind of space.

We are not about to leave for a new destination so much as to explore the place where we have arrived. In the much-quoted words from

T. S. Eliot's poem *Little Gidding*: "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time." We spend the next fifty days discovering how different the world looks in the light of the resurrection.

This means that Pentecost is not our goal, as if we were deprived of the Holy Spirit until then. On the contrary, we spend the entire fifty days immersed in the Spirit. In partnership with John's gospel, the Spirit leads us into our heart of hearts where divine love dwells. In partnership with the Acts of the Apostles, the Spirit sends us out on our mission to announce good news. It's a spirited season from start to finish.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

10:34, 37–43

Peter addressed Cornelius and his household: 'You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of Nazareth and how he began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil. Now I, and those with me, can witness to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judaea and in Jerusalem itself: and also to the fact that they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand. Now we are those witnesses – we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead – and he has ordered us to proclaim this to his people and to tell them that God has appointed him to judge everyone, alive or dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear this witness: that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name.'

Responsorial Psalm Ps 117:1–2, 16–17, 22–23

R. This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad.

or

R. Alleluia.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
for his love has no end.

Let the sons of Israel say:
'His love has no end.' **R.**

The Lord's right hand has triumphed;
his right hand raised me up.
I shall not die, I shall live
and recount his deeds. **R.**

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.
This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes. **R.**

First Reading

For the fifty days of the Easter season, as at no other time of the year, the liturgy of the word begins with a reading from the New rather than the Old Testament. Each year of the lectionary cycle presents a progressive selection of passages from the Acts of the Apostles. These run in parallel with the other two readings without any specific connection between them.

Paul is credited with being the "apostle to the Gentiles," but Peter is the real pioneer of this missionary outreach. The whole of chapter 10 is devoted to this and it's well worth reading in full. Peter's insight occurs entirely by divine initiative. He's given a vision while at prayer in the Roman stronghold of Caesarea. A sheet is lowered from heaven three times with creatures deemed unclean by Jewish Law but which Peter is told to eat. He eventually realised this was a sign that Gentiles were not to be regarded as unclean and off limits.

None of this background is contained in the reading for today. What we hear is Peter's preaching to the Roman centurion Cornelius and his household. He presents them with a summary of the good news. Understandably what he has to say is still couched in terms that would have been more intelligible to a Jewish audience, but the conclusion is clear: "all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name."

Testimony like this is found in several other places in the Acts, underscoring its centrality for the early Christian community and its missionaries. Readers should proclaim this core confession of faith with authority and assurance.

Responsorial Psalm

The responsorial psalm for the Mass of Easter Day is identical to that of the vigil service. Psalm 117/118 is also the source for next Sunday's responsorial psalm, suggesting it has a particular affinity with the mystery of Jesus' death and resurrection. The opening words of the third stanza – "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone" – are cited in the synoptic gospels, the Acts and in the first letter of Peter.

In its original form the psalm was a processional hymn to accompany entry into the Temple. It celebrates the victory of an individual (perhaps a king) over a hostile threat. The three verses come from different parts of the psalm. The first is a call to the community to join in giving thanks. The second acclaims the Lord for the deliverance the psalmist has enjoyed, and the third may be quoting a popular saying about how dramatic reversals of fortune can take place.

The references to being "raised up" and the claim "I shall not die, I shall live" have clear application to the resurrection of Jesus, but the passion is also alluded to in the phrase "the stone which the builders rejected." With the triple "Alleluia" serving as the response, this responsorial psalm is a joyous chant of triumph. Readers should be happy to enter into its ardent spirit.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Colossians**

3:1–4

Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you too will be revealed in all your glory with him.

Alternative Second Reading

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians**

5:6–8

You must know how even a small amount of yeast is enough to leaven all the dough, so get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves into a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

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

20:1–9

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Second Reading

Each of the two alternative texts for today's second reading has an Easter pedigree. In pre-Vatican II times, the passage from Colossians used to be read at the Vigil service and that from 1 Corinthians on Easter Sunday.

The reading from Colossians may seem other-worldly. "Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on earth," the author writes. But the letter as a whole shows that the contrast between heavenly and earthly things is that between a life informed by the Spirit and a life subject to the power of sin and death. This very short passage glows with the glory of the resurrection. Readers should deliver it in this spirit.

Alternative Second Reading

Paul's teaching in this text has been prompted by the report of a man engaging in a sexual relationship with his stepmother. This brings the image of yeast to mind. Just as yeast works its way through dough, so can immorality corrupt the community. So, he argues, the immoral behaviour must be got rid of like old yeast. The community must be freed of corruption and live "in sincerity and truth," like unleavened bread that has not been infected with the old yeast. What emerges then out of a problematic situation is a powerful message: "Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast." This is what readers need to make clear to the assembly.

Gospel

If the faithful have come to church today expecting a triumphant report of Jesus' resurrection, they are sure to be disappointed. There's plenty of activity – Mary of Magdala "came running to Simon Peter," and Peter and the other disciple "ran together" to the tomb – but to what purpose? In the whole story there's only one brief and rather matter-of-fact affirmation. We are told that when the other disciple went into the tomb, "he saw and he believed."

At this stage neither Mary of Magdala or Peter seem to grasp what has happened. Nor is there much to incite our own faith, only a strange observation about the burial cloths. Has our joyful acclamation in response to the psalm – "This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice" – been premature? We are being challenged to be patient, to take time to share the perplexity of the first disciples, to fast for a while from our ingrained expectation of instant gratification. From early times the Church set aside fifty days for the truth of the resurrection to sink in. In the course of these days we will hear stories of Jesus' resurrection appearances and testimony about life in the Spirit. Sadly, one of the most beautiful of those stories, that of Jesus' encounter with Mary of Magdala (Jn 20:11-18), is never read at a Sunday eucharist.

While today's gospel reading may sound underwhelming, it still deserves to be read with care and clarity.

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.

EASTER SUNDAY

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 10:34, 37–43

Peter began to speak to those assembled in the house of Cornelius.

“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel,
preaching peace by Jesus Christ—
he is Lord of all.

That message spread throughout Judea,
beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John announced:
how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth
with the Holy Spirit and with power;
how he went about doing good
and healing all who were oppressed by the devil,
for God was with him.

“We are witnesses to all that he did
both in Judea and in Jerusalem.
They put him to death by hanging him on a tree;
but God raised him on the third day
and allowed him to appear, not to all the people
but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses,
and who ate and drank with him
after he rose from the dead.

“He commanded us to preach to the people
and to testify that he is the one ordained by God
as judge of the living and the dead.
All the prophets testify about him
that everyone who believes in him
receives forgiveness of sins through his name”.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Colossians 3:1–4

If you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things that are above,
where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
Set your minds on things that are above,
not on things that are on earth, for you have died,
and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
When Christ who is your life is revealed,
then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

Alternative Second Reading

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5:6–8

Do you not know that a little yeast
leavens the whole batch of dough?
Clean out the old yeast so that you may be a new batch,
as you really are unleavened.
For our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed.
Therefore, let us celebrate the festival,
not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil,
but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 20:1–9

Early on the first day of the week,
while it was still dark,
Mary Magdalene came to the tomb
and saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb
So she ran and went to Simon Peter and the other disciple,
the one whom Jesus loved, and said to them,
“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb,
and we do not know where they have laid him.”
Then Peter and the other disciple set out and went toward the tomb.
The two were running together,
but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.
He bent down to look in and saw the linen wrappings lying there,
but he did not go in.
Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb.
He saw the linen wrappings lying there,
and the cloth that had been on Jesus’ head,
not lying with the linen wrappings but rolled up in a place by itself.
Then the other disciple, who reached the tomb first, also went in,
and he saw and believed;
for as yet they did not understand the scripture,
that he must rise from the dead.

Blessing for Easter Sunday

May almighty God bless us through today's Easter Solemnity
and, in his compassion,
defend us from every assault of sin.

Amen.

And may he, who restores us to eternal life
in the Resurrection of his Only Begotten,
endow us with the prize of immortality.

Amen.

Now that the days of the Lord's Passion have drawn to a close,
may we who celebrate the gladness of the Paschal Feast
come with Christ's help, and exulting in spirit,
to those feasts that are celebrated in eternal joy.

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 Easter Vigil, Roman Missal p 422)