

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

3rd Sunday of Easter

Year B

14 April 2024



Collect

May your people exult for ever, O God,
in renewed youthfulness of spirit,
so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption,
we may look forward in confident hope
to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection.
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

To preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins is what the risen Lord commissions the disciples to do (Lk 24:27). Repentance might strike us as a Lenten, rather than an Easter, concern. A quick glance through a standard collection of Easter hymns reveals common themes like triumph, joy, light, glory, eternal life and feasting, and only occasional references to pardon from sin. It's worth turning our minds back to what many of us heard as we were marked on Ash Wednesday: "Repent, and believe in the Gospel." This brief injunction suggests that repentance is choosing to let go of all that hinders our embrace of the good news. It's a perennial summons to come forth from the grave of our self-obsession and live.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

3:13–15, 17–19

Peter said to the people 'You are Israelites, and it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus, the same Jesus you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate, after Pilate had decided to release him. It was you who accused the Holy One, the Just One, you who demanded the reprieve of a murderer while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are the witnesses.

'Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing; this was the way God carried out what he had foretold, when he said through all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.'

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 4:2, 4, 7, 9

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

or

R. Alleluia.

When I call, answer me, O God of justice;
from anguish you released me, have mercy and
hear me! **R.**

It is the Lord who grants favours to those whom he
loves;
the Lord hears me whenever I call him. **R.**

'What can bring us happiness?' many say.
Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord. **R.**

I will lie down in peace and sleep comes at once,
for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. **R.**

First Reading

Readers would be well advised to take up their New Testaments and read Acts 3:1-12 to familiarise themselves with the event that leads to today's extract from Peter's third speech. By restoring a lame beggar to lively health, Peter has amazed the crowd. He immediately sets about instructing them lest they misunderstand what has happened. The miracle is not his doing, but God's. This assertion serves as a springboard for a lengthy proclamation of the good news.

In the short section that we hear, Peter insists that God is the principal actor in the drama of Jesus' death and resurrection. All is in accord with the divine plan, and all has been accomplished by divine power. Nonetheless the people have played a part by their complicity in Jesus' condemnation and death. Peter both accuses and excuses them for this. Now their task is to acknowledge guilt and repent.

In these few verses Peter raises complex questions about divine and human agency that continue to daunt believers. At the same time he highlights the unique importance of Jesus, naming him in turn as servant, the Holy One, the Just One, and the prince of life. His final focus on the need to repent may seem downbeat, but it bears the promise of complete forgiveness.

Leaving aside the thorny issue of the interplay between human freedom and divine purpose, readers have the immediate task of delivering a text comprised largely of long sentences with dependent clauses. The more they can imagine themselves to be members of the assembly trying to grasp Peter's message in a single hearing the better. Careful study of his rhetoric to distinguish between his core assertions and their elaboration will be invaluable. A confident tone, a measured pace and thoughtful pausing will serve the assembly well.

Responsorial Psalm

At heart, Psalm 4 is a personal prayer of peaceful trust that ensues from the psalmist's delivery by God from a distressing experience. At the same time the psalm is multi-faceted. It contains a plea for a merciful hearing, a declaration of confidence in God, a word of wisdom, and a final expression of childlike trust.

In the context of Easter, Christian believers will readily identify this with the person of Jesus. He called on God in his distress, entrusted himself into God's hands, was heard favourably by the one who loved him, and was raised to see God's glorious face.

The short response – "Lord, let your face shine on us" – invites us to make the psalmist's confession of trust our own. In whatever way the shadow of death looms over us, we ask for the light of God's face to dispel it. Within the verses there is constant movement back and forth between prayers addressed to God and general affirmations. They ought not be muddled by hasty proclamation. Additional care needs to be taken with the unusual format of two-line stanzas.

A reading from the first letter of St John 2:1–5

I am writing this, my children,
to stop you sinning;
but if anyone should sin,
we have our advocate with the Father,
Jesus Christ, who is just;
he is the sacrifice that takes our sins away,
and not only ours,
but the whole world's.
We can be sure that we know God
only by keeping his commandments.
Anyone who says, 'I know him',
and does not keep his commandments,
is a liar,
refusing to admit the truth.
But when anyone does obey what he has said,
God's love comes to perfection in him.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

24:35–48

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.

They were still talking about this when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they could not believe it, and they stood dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.

Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.' He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

Second Reading

Having begun our series of readings from 1 John with an extract from its last chapter, we return to an early part of the letter. From today the readings progress through the chapters in their original order.

Today's text gets off to an arresting start: "I am writing this, my children, to stop you sinning." This abrupt statement of intent is softened both by the use of the affectionate term "children" and by what follows. John assures his community that Christ has taken the whole world's sin away and continues to be our advocate. Elsewhere in John the role of advocacy is attributed to the Paraclete (eg Jn 14:16.26).

It seems that some people are claiming a knowledge of God that allows them to live as they please. John is categorical. The evidence for knowing God (a knowing that means being in a loving personal relationship) is keeping the commandments. Later in the letter, in a verse we will hear on the Fifth Sunday, John explains what these commandments are: believing in Jesus and loving one another (3:23). Like the letter as a whole, this reading has the character of an address by a teacher or spiritual director. It invites thoughtful delivery and meditative reception.

Gospel

Luke's account of the risen Lord's appearance has parallels with last Sunday's gospel story from John. Fear is a common feature. In John, the disciples are afraid of the Jews; in Luke, they are terrified by the sight of Jesus. In John, Jesus explicitly greets them with "Peace"; Luke clearly implies this is Jesus' wish. Both evangelists stress the physicality of Jesus' presence. In John, it's the sceptical Thomas whom Jesus invites to touch his wounds; in Luke, it's all the disciples. Luke reports that Jesus gave evidence of his bodily reality by eating fish. John has a similar story to tell, but in the appendix to his gospel (21:1-25).

Luke also repeats elements from the preceding episode of the journey to Emmaus, but in reverse. On the way to Emmaus, Jesus first sheds light on the baffling event of his death by explaining the scriptures to the two disciples; only at table are their eyes fully opened. In Jerusalem that night, he first eats, then interprets the scriptures. This done, a new and decisive era opens up. Jesus commissions the disciples to preach "repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . to all the nations." Luke goes on to write an entire book about this mission.

Who are the ones designated as witnesses? When the two disciples return to Jerusalem from Emmaus, they "found the Eleven assembled together with their companions." In the light of this statement, it's plausible that those being sent included the women who had accompanied Jesus from Galilee and witnessed his death (23:49). This is certainly the mission of all the baptised today.

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.

THIRD SUNDAY OF EASTER

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 3:13–15, 17–19

At the temple gate, Peter addressed the people:

"The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.

"But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

"And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.

In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer.

"Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of John 2:1–5

My little children,

I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin.

But if anyone does sin,

we have an advocate with the Father;

Jesus Christ the righteous;

and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins,

and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

Now by this we may be sure that we know him,

if we obey his commandments.

Whoever says, "I have come to know him,"

but does not obey his commandments, is a liar,

and in such a person the truth does not exist;

but whoever obeys his word,

truly in this person the love of God has reached perfection.

By this we may be sure that we are in him.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 24:35–48

The two disciples told the eleven and their companions

what had happened on the road to Emmaus,

and how Jesus had been made known to them

in the breaking of the bread.

While they were talking about this,

Jesus himself stood among them and said to them,

"Peace be with you."

They were startled and terrified,

and thought that they were seeing a ghost.

He said to them,

"Why are you frightened,

and why do doubts arise in your hearts?"

Look at my hands and my feet;
see that it is I myself.
Touch me and see;
for a ghost does not have flesh and bones
as you see that I have."
And when he had said this,
he showed them his hands and his feet.
While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering,
he said to them,
"Have you anything here to eat?"
They gave him a piece of broiled fish,
and he took it and ate in their presence.
Then he said to them,
"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you-
that everything written about me in the law of Moses,
the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled."
Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,
and he said to them,
"Thus it is written,
that the Messiah is to suffer
and to rise from the dead on the third day,
and that repentance and forgiveness of sins
is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations,
beginning from Jerusalem.
You are witnesses of these things."

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.)