

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Pentecost Sunday

Year B

19 May 2024



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 to turn the poetry into prose. This psalm should be a joy for readers to proclaim.

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

5:16–25

If you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence, since self-indulgence is the opposite of the Spirit, the Spirit is totally against such a thing, and it is precisely because the two are so opposed that you do not always carry out your good intentions. If you are led by the Spirit, no law can touch you. When self-indulgence is at work the results are obvious: fornication, gross indecency and sexual irresponsibility; idolatry and sorcery; feuds and wrangling, jealousy, bad temper and quarrels; disagreements, factions, envy; drunkenness, orgies and similar things. I warn you now, as I warned you before: those who behave like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. What the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control. There can be no law against things like that, of course. You cannot belong to Christ Jesus unless you crucify all self-indulgent passions and desire.

Since the Spirit is our life, let us be directed by the Spirit.

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

15:26–27; 16:12–15

Jesus said to his disciples:

'When the Advocate comes,
whom I shall send to you from the Father,
the Spirit of truth who issues from the Father,
he will be my witness.

And you too will be witnesses,
because you have been with me from the outset.

'I still have many things to say to you
but they would be too much for you now.
But when the Spirit of truth comes
he will lead you to the complete truth,
since he will not be speaking as from himself
but will say only what he has learnt;
and he will tell you of the things to come.

He will glorify me,
since all he tells you
will be taken from what is mine.
Everything the Father has is mine;
that is why I said:
All he tells you
will be taken from what is mine.'

Second Reading

The tenor of the optional second reading for Year B text may deter its use. (The second reading and gospel for Year A may also be read in Years B and C.) Following the tumultuous energy of the Pentecost event, echoed in the psalm, the text from Galatians may come as something of a let-down. It presents a rather dark portrait of human nature, illumined only by a couple of shafts of light. Having championed the cause of freedom (5:1), Paul feels the need to issue a stern warning against its abuse. He enumerates at length the rotten fruits that self-indulgence engenders, all of which are destructive of community. Lists of moral evils like these were conventional in writings of the time. It's worth noting that few of Paul's list are so-called sins of the flesh.

Only towards the end of the passage does Paul offer a counter-list of the fruits of the Spirit, such as peace, goodness and patience. All are manifestations of the love that binds a community together. They are subject to no law or limit. But no sooner has Paul raised our spirits than he issues a further warning. You cannot belong to Christ, he writes, without crucifying all self-indulgent desires and passions.

If the first reading left us intoxicated with the Spirit, this one sobers us up with a large dose of cold water. Readers may be tempted to skim through Paul's warnings and his catalogue of vices, but they should not be down-played. On other hand, it would do no harm to dwell on the fruits of the Spirit, and especially to ensure that the appeal with which the reading ends lodges firmly in the minds of the assembly.

Gospel

In the course of his farewell conversation with the disciples, Jesus makes repeated reference to the Advocate or Paraclete whom he and the Father will send to them. Today's gospel yokes together two excerpts from this final testament, one from chapter 15, the other from chapter 16.

The role of the Paraclete is to bear witness to Jesus and enable the disciples to grasp the truth that Jesus has embodied and taught. The Paraclete is not an independent agent but one who operates on behalf of and in union with Jesus and the Father. The effect of the Paraclete's testimony is to equip the disciples – those who have been with Jesus from the beginning – to bear witness to him in the world. Much earlier in the gospel (7:39), John inserted an editorial comment to the effect that the gift of the Spirit could not be realised until Jesus had been glorified. That is soon to occur.

The intimate setting of these reflections and their meditative character contrast sharply with the public drama of Pentecost Day. The primary emphasis is on the interior work of the Paraclete illuminating the minds and hearts of the disciples, though this will bear fruit in their witness before the world. This reading is one to be proclaimed thoughtfully and deliberately. It brings the great fifty days of the Easter season to a quiet conclusion but only to sow the seeds of a mission that will encompass the earth.

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.

PENTECOST SUNDAY

FIRST READING (NRSV)

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

When the day of Pentecost had come,
they were all together in one place.
And suddenly from heaven there came a sound
like the rush of a violent wind,
and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.
Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them,
and a tongue rested on each of them.
All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit
and began to speak in other languages,
as the Spirit gave them ability.
Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven
living in Jerusalem.
And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered,
because all heard them speaking in their own languages.
Amazed and astonished, they asked,
“Are not all these who are speaking Galileans?
And how is it that we hear, each of us,
in our own language?
Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia,
Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia,
Phrygia and Pamphylia,
Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene,
and visitors from Rome, both Jews and converts,
Cretans and Arabs—
in our own languages we hear them speaking
about God’s deeds of power.”

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Galatians 5:16–25

Brothers and sisters:
Live by the Spirit,
and do not gratify the desires of the flesh.
For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit,
and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh;
for these are opposed to each other,
to prevent you from doing what you want.
But if you are led by the Spirit,
you are not subject to the law.
Now the works of the flesh are obvious:
fornication, impurity, licentiousness,
idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife,
jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions,
factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing,
and things like these.
I am warning you, as I warned you before:
those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.
By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace,
patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness,
gentleness, and self-control.
There is no law against such things.
And those who belong to Christ Jesus
have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.
If we live by the Spirit,
let us also be guided by the Spirit.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 15:26–27; 16:12–15

Jesus spoke to the disciples:
"When the Advocate comes,
whom I will send to you from the Father,
the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father,
he will testify on my behalf.
You also are to testify
because you have been with me from the beginning.
"I still have many things to say to you,
but you cannot bear them now.
When the Spirit of truth comes,
he will guide you into all the truth;
for he will not speak on his own,
but will speak whatever he hears,
and he will declare to you the things that are to come.
He will glorify me,
because he will take what is mine and declare it to you.
"All that the Father has is mine.
For this reason I said that he will take what is mine
and declare it to you."

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.)