

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

14 July 2024



### Collect

O God, who show the light of your truth  
to those who go astray,  
so that they may return to the right path,  
give all who for the faith they profess  
are accounted Christians  
the grace to reject whatever is contrary to the name of Christ  
and to strive after all that does it honour.  
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

Blessings are front and centre in today's presentation of God's word. The author of the letter to the Ephesians launches into a long list of them right from the start. They bring to mind a particular blessing enjoyed by Mass-goers for the past fifty years or so. After some 1500 years during which the sole eucharistic prayer was the Roman Canon (now the 1<sup>st</sup> Eucharistic Prayer), the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council paved the way for the commissioning of new prayers, inspired by those of the early centuries. These had grown out of Jewish forms of praise, thanks and blessing. Today's reading from Ephesians is a glorious example of the Christian adaptation of such a Jewish prayer. We could well imagine it leading to the ritual remembrance of the Last Supper. The Church today has thirteen authorised eucharistic prayers, including two on the theme of reconciliation, three for use with young children, and four variations of one for special needs and occasions. There are also scores of prefaces to serve as the first part of the eucharistic prayer. We are indeed blessed to have such a wealth of prayers with which to voice our faith.

## A reading from the prophet Amos

7:12–15

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, said to Amos, 'Go away, seer; get back to the land of Judah; earn your bread there, do your prophesying there. We want no more prophesying in Bethel; this is the royal sanctuary, the national temple.' 'I was no prophet, neither did I belong to any of the brotherhoods of prophets.' Amos replied to Amaziah, 'I was a shepherd, and looked after sycamores: but it was the Lord who took me from herding the flock, and the Lord who said, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel.''"

## First Reading

Today's short passage from the prophet Amos would have been a good match for last Sunday's gospel in which Jesus declares it's the fate of the prophet not to be listened to. Presumably this text was chosen for today because just as Jesus sends the Twelve into potentially unreceptive territory, so Amos was sent from the southern kingdom of Judah to the affluent and corrupt kingdom of Israel. The one clue to the historical circumstances of Amos' mission (7:9-10) places him in Bethel in the mid-8<sup>th</sup> century before the birth of Christ. This makes him one of the earliest prophets to have his words recorded.

Amos arouses the wrath of the priest Amaziah because he has dared to prophesy that King Jeroboam would die and the people be taken into exile. Amos defends himself from the accusation that he is a career prophet. On the contrary, he was uprooted from his life on the land and dispatched to prophesy to a self-indulgent society that preyed on the poor. Amaziah does not seek to bar Amos from prophesying altogether, only at the royal shrine.

In all likelihood, most members of the gathered assembly will not be familiar with the circumstances of Amos' mission, but the message conveyed by the reading should be clear enough. Troublesome prophets who pass judgement on the status quo and call for a change of heart are not welcome. The reading consists almost entirely of the dialogue between Amaziah and Amos. This gives it an immediacy that will enable readers to readily engage the assembly's attention.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 84:9–14

**R.** Lord, show us your mercy and love,  
and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,  
a voice that speaks of peace,  
peace for his people.

His help is near for those who fear him  
and his glory will dwell in our land. **R.**

Mercy and faithfulness have met;  
justice and peace have embraced.  
Faithfulness shall spring from the earth  
and justice look down from heaven. **R.**

The Lord will make us prosper  
and our earth shall yield its fruit.  
Justice shall march before him  
and peace shall follow his steps. **R.**

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 84/85 is a heartfelt plea for God's help and forgiveness on the basis of what God did for them in the past. It seems to reflect the people's struggle to rebuild their life and the city after returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon over two hundred years after Amos' mission. However, the acute distress they feel is not at all evident in the response and stanzas of the responsorial psalm, as these are drawn from the confident final section of the psalm.

As it appears in the lectionary, the responsorial psalm exemplifies how a prophet should be heard and heeded. In the name of the people, the psalmist promises to "hear what the Lord God has to say." When attended to, God's word assures a plethora of blessings – peace, help, glory, mercy, justice, fruitfulness and prosperity. In the tradition of Hebrew poetry these terms are repeated in parallel forms.

As a vote of confidence in God's covenant love, the psalm should be a joy for readers to proclaim. They will need to give clear vocal and visual cues to ensure the congregation hears the whole two-line response before repeating it. The verses to be prayed are in standard four-line form and familiar language.

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

**1:3–14**

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of heaven in  
Christ.

Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in Christ,  
to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his  
presence,  
determined that we should become his adopted sons,  
through Jesus Christ  
for his own kind purposes,  
to make us praise the glory of his grace,  
his free gift to us in the Beloved  
in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom,  
the forgiveness of our sins.  
Such is the richness of the grace  
which he has showered on us  
in all wisdom and insight.  
He has let us know the mystery of his purpose,  
the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the beginning  
to act upon when the times had run their course to the end:  
that he would bring everything together under Christ, as head,  
everything in the heavens and everything on earth.

[And it is in him that we were claimed as God's own,  
chosen from the beginning,  
under the predetermined plan of the one who guides all things  
as he decides by his own will;  
chosen to be,  
for his greater glory,  
the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he  
came.  
Now you too, in him,  
have heard the message of the truth  
and the good news of your salvation,  
and have believed it:  
and you have been stamped with the seal  
of the Holy Spirit of the Promise,  
the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom for those  
whom God has taken for his own,  
to make his glory praised.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

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

**6:7–13**

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out in  
pairs giving them authority over the unclean spirits. And he  
instructed them to take nothing for the journey except a staff -  
no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their purses. They  
were to wear sandals, but, he added, 'Do not take a spare  
tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter a house anywhere,  
stay there until you leave the district. And if any place does  
not welcome you and people refuse to listen to you, as you  
walk away shake off the dust from under your feet as a sign  
to them.' So they set off to preach repentance; and they cast  
out many devils, and anointed many sick people with oil and  
cured them.

**Second Reading**

Having been treated to several passages from two  
letters universally attributed to Paul, 1 and 2  
Corinthians, we now hear seven excerpts from a  
different kind of document. Though commonly  
referred to as Paul's letter to the Ephesians, it may  
well be a circular letter to a number of churches,  
written by a follower of Paul, drawing heavily on his  
letter to the Colossians. It doesn't display Paul's  
personal touches. Its language is florid and elevated  
in tone, seemingly inspired by liturgical prayer.

This is evident in today's text, a lengthy prayer in the  
style of a Jewish blessing. A single sentence in Greek,  
it is broken down into six or seven in English,  
depending on the translation. Most of these remain  
long and complex. As beautiful as the prayer is,  
pastoral reasons may favour choosing the shorter  
option. Either way, readers will need to study the text  
carefully and rehearse it thoroughly.

The first thing to note, of course, is that the reading is a  
prayer, as the opening words make clear: "Blessed be  
God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." From then  
on, however, the prayer becomes a litany of the  
blessings for which God is to be praised and thanked  
– adoption, forgiveness, grace, hope, truth, good  
news, the Holy Spirit, freedom.

The elaborate sentences and ornate style will test the  
skill of even the most practised of readers. Their aim  
will be to enable the assembly to wonder at the  
wealth of blessings believers enjoy. A heightened  
tone, well-chosen pauses, thoughtful emphases and a  
deliberate pace will all be needed to do justice to this  
beautiful prayer.

**Gospel**

The two outstanding elements of Jesus' mission in the  
gospel of Mark are his preaching and casting out evil  
spirits. In sending out the Twelve, Jesus is  
commissioning them to do what he does. They preach  
repentance and cast out devils.

In the same vein, when Jesus directs them to venture  
forth without bread, bags, coins or spare tunic, he may  
well be asking them to do no more than to observe his  
own common practice. Such poverty was also the  
custom of itinerant Cynic philosophers, but they lived  
out in the open and did not accept offers of  
hospitality. The Twelve are told to be content with  
whatever lodging is offered them, thus ensuring they  
could not be accused of self-interest. Mark says that  
the Twelve also cured many sick people by anointing  
them with oil, which Jesus is never reported as doing.

In Mark's gospel, Jesus is intent on liberating people  
from the grip of whatever demonic powers held them  
captive. In the worldview of the time, all kinds of  
afflictions were attributed to evil spirits. These malign  
beings were no match for the life-giving power of  
Jesus' word. He set people free and restored their  
humanity, yet he himself would be cast out and  
executed.

This action-oriented episode lends itself to lively  
proclamation.

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.

## FIFTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

### FIRST READING (NRSV)

#### **A reading from the book of the prophet Amos 7:12–15**

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, said to Amos,  
"O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah,  
earn your bread there, and prophesy there;  
but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary,  
and it is a temple of the kingdom."

Then Amos answered Amaziah,  
"I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son;  
but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees,  
and the Lord took me from following the flock,  
and the Lord said to me,  
'Go, prophesy to my people Israel.'"

### SECOND READING (NRSV)

#### **A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 1:3–14**

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
who has blessed us in Christ  
with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.  
Before the foundation of the world God chose us in Christ  
to be holy and blameless before him in love.  
God destined us for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ,  
according to the good pleasure of God's will,  
this is for the praise of his glorious grace  
that God freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.  
In Christ we have redemption through his blood,  
the forgiveness of our trespasses,  
according to the riches of his grace  
that he lavished on us.

With all wisdom and insight  
God has made known to us the mystery of his will,  
according to his good pleasure that he set forth in Christ,  
as a plan for the fullness of time,  
to gather up all things in Christ,  
things in heaven and things on earth.

[In Christ we have also obtained an inheritance,  
having been destined according to the purpose of God  
who accomplishes all things according to his counsel and will,  
so that we, who were the first to set our hope on Christ,  
might live for the praise of his glory.

In him you also, when you had heard the word of truth,  
the gospel of your salvation,  
and had believed in him,  
were marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit.

This is the pledge of our inheritance toward redemption  
as God's own people, to the praise of his glory.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

## GOSPEL (NRSV)

### A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 6:7–13

Jesus called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

Jesus said to them,  
"Wherever you enter a house,  
stay there until you leave the place.  
If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you,  
as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet  
as a testimony against them."  
So the twelve went out and proclaimed that all should repent.  
They cast out many demons,  
and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time II)

May the peace of God,  
which surpasses all understanding,  
keep our hearts and minds  
in the knowledge and love of God,  
and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

**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 II, Roman Missal p. 715)