

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

7 July 2024



Collect

O God, who in the abasement of your Son
have raised up a fallen world,
fill your faithful with holy joy,
for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin
you bestow eternal gladness.
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

Paul's lengthy defence of his apostolic authority in chapters 10-13 of 2 Corinthians doesn't make for easy reading. It's aggressive and defensive at the same time. His declaration that "it is when I am weak that I am strong" is neither his first nor his last word on the subject. In the calmer opening chapters of his first letter to the community at Corinth, he had written of the opposition between human and divine wisdom, starkly made plain in the crucifixion of Christ. The cross brings human wisdom undone, for the crucified Christ, seemingly the epitome of human weakness, is in fact "the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:25). Insofar as the prevailing culture of our own time prizes ambition, status and personal achievement, the figure of the Crucified One is at odds with it. For reasons good and bad, the Church today is increasingly conscious of its weakness. Can we emulate Paul and find strength in our weakness?

A reading from the prophet Ezekiel

2:2–5

The spirit came into me and made me stand up, and I heard the Lord speaking to me. He said, 'Son of man, I am sending you up to the Israelites, to the rebels who have turned against me. Till now they and their ancestors have been in revolt against me. The sons are defiant and obstinate; I am sending you to them, to say, "The Lord says this." Whether they listen or not, this set of rebels shall know there is a prophet among them.'

First Reading

The holiness of God and the wilful resistance of Israel are core themes in the book of the prophet Ezekiel. The gulf between the Divine Other and mere mortals is epitomised by the way Ezekiel is addressed repeatedly as "son of man" or "mortal one." Nonetheless he is commissioned to speak God's word to the exiles in Babylon.

Today's short reading gives us a snapshot of his task. The Israelites to whom he is sent are accused of being rebels. They have been in revolt for generations and are defiant and obstinate. These are serious allegations, but the passage gives no clue as to how this rebelliousness has been manifest or what consequences they have suffered as a result.

In effect it is an abstract of the prophet's mission which is to summon the people to repentance, conversion and fresh allegiance. There is no guarantee of success. They may or may not listen, but they will have no excuse, because it will be clear that a prophet bearing God's word has been sent among them.

After the introductory sentence, the reading is God's address to Ezekiel, solemnly commissioning him. Of its nature it invites serious and authoritative proclamation.

Responsorial Psalm

R. Our eyes are fixed on the Lord,
pleading for his mercy.

To you have I lifted up my eyes,
you who dwell in the heavens:
my eyes, like the eyes of slaves
on the hand of their lords. R.

Like the eyes of a servant
on the hand of his mistress,
so our eyes are on the Lord our God
till he shows us his mercy. R.

Have mercy on us, Lord, have mercy.
We are filled with contempt.
Indeed all too full is our soul
with the scorn of the rich,
with the proud man's disdain. R.

Ps 122

Responsorial Psalm

Although Psalm 122/123 is placed within the collection of psalms called "Songs of Ascent" (120-134), it contains no reference to pilgrimage or the ascent to Jerusalem. It is a deeply felt plea for God's help. The whole psalm is prayed as the responsorial psalm.

It begins as the prayer of an individual who likens his relationship with God to that of a slave constantly watching his master for a sign of his wishes. This comparison is varied in the second verse with the parallel example of a maid-servant and her mistress. The last line of this verse – "till he show us his mercy" – sets the scene for the people's urgent pleading for God's mercy in the final verse.

The response captures both themes of the psalm – trustful attentiveness to God and the urgent need for mercy. There's no mistaking that this psalm is a heartfelt prayer. Following the reading from Ezekiel, it is hard to square its humility of spirit with the recalcitrance of the exiles. Perhaps it can be seen as the prophet's response to the opposition he faces. Readers will exercise their ministry well by praying this psalm with sincere feeling.

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

12:7–10

In view of the extraordinary nature of these revelations, to stop me from getting too proud I was given a thorn in the flesh, an angel of Satan to beat me and stop me from getting too proud! About this thing, I have pleaded with the Lord three times for it to leave me, but he has said, 'My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness.' So I shall be very happy to make my weaknesses my special boast so that the power of Christ may stay over me, and that is why I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and the agonies I go through for Christ's sake. For it is when I am weak that I am strong.

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

6:1–6

Jesus went to his home town and his disciples accompanied him. With the coming of the sabbath he began teaching in the synagogue and most of them were astonished when they heard him. They said, 'Where did the man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been granted him, and these miracles that are worked through him? This is the carpenter, surely, the son of Mary, the brother of James and Joset and Jude and Simon? His sisters, too, are they not here with us?' And they would not accept him. And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is only despised in his own country among his own relations and in his own house'; and he could work no miracle there, though he cured a few sick people by laying his hands on them. He was amazed at their lack of faith.

Second Reading

Two whole chapters – eight and nine – of 2 Corinthians are devoted to Paul's earnest attempt to persuade the community to give generously to his Jerusalem collection. The next four chapters are so different in tone and topic that a number of scholars consider them a separate letter. Paul embarks on a lengthy and polemical defence of his apostolic authority, using a range of rhetorical weapons like anger, sarcasm and irony. No wonder the lectionary is content to include just one excerpt from this diatribe.

None of this background is conveyed by the chosen text. It begins with an unexplained reference to extraordinary revelations that Paul has experienced. In the preceding verses he has resorted to boasting about visions and revelations he has received. He then changes tack, presenting a counter-argument. Far from being strong, he claims to be beset by weakness. He turns this into an asset rather than a liability, though what he means by "a thorn in the flesh" remains unclear to this day. He rounds out this element of his strident defence with a memorable saying: "For it is when I am weak that I am strong."

Readers who check out all four chapters of Paul's impassioned self-justification will be better equipped to proclaim this reading with the depth of feeling it deserves. Paul is on his high horse, responding to his critics with all his might. For all its paradoxical truth, his confession of weakness is not a concession but a rejoinder.

Gospel

Having reported two inter-related stories of faith – the healing of the woman with the haemorrhage and the raising of Jairus' daughter – Mark now paints a very different picture. In a scene that brings the parallel in Luke to mind (4:16-30), Mark draws attention to the unbelief of Jesus' own family and townsfolk. In a telling example of cognitive dissonance, they acknowledge his astonishing teaching and healing powers but refuse to believe in him. Their familiarity with the facts of Jesus' upbringing is an unsurmountable barrier to their acceptance of the underlying truth of his identity.

Commentators on this passage point out that mention of Jesus' brothers and sisters may simply reflect the broader use of these terms to designate members of one's extended family. Some also note that Mark's gospel pre-dates the emergence of belief in Mary's virginity.

The saying that Jesus cites about prophets being rejected by their own is found in one form or another in both Jewish and Greek literature of the time. At this point in the gospel of Mark it sounds a note of warning about the growing opposition Jesus will face and the unbelief he will encounter, even within the circle of his disciples.

This episode is briskly told by Mark. The narrative and dialogue combine to drive it forward to its ominous conclusion. Ministers of the word are sure to find this a lively story to proclaim.

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.

FOURTEENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Ezekiel 2:2–5

The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God.
When I saw this, I fell on my face,
and I heard the voice of someone speaking.
When the voice spoke to me,
a spirit entered into me and set me on my feet;
and I heard one speaking to me:
"Mortal, I am sending you to the people of Israel,
to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me;
The descendants are impudent and stubborn.
I am sending you to them, and you shall say to them,
'Thus says the Lord God.'
Whether they hear or refuse to hear
(for they are a rebellious house),
they shall know that there has been a prophet among them."

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians 12:7–10

Considering the exceptional character of the revelations,
to keep me from being too elated,
a thorn was given me in the flesh,
a messenger of Satan to torment me,
to keep me from being too elated.
Three times I appealed to the Lord about this,
that it would leave me,
but he said to me,
"My grace is sufficient for you,
for power is made perfect in weakness."
So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses,
so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.
Therefore I am content
with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities
for the sake of Christ;
for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 6:1–6

Jesus came to his hometown, and his disciples followed him.
On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue,
and many who heard him were astounded.
They said, "Where did this man get all this?
What is this wisdom that has been given to him?
What deeds of power are being done by his hands!
Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary
and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon,
and are not his sisters here with us?"

And they took offence at him.
Then Jesus said to them,
"Prophets are not without honour,
except in their hometown,
and among their own kin, and in their own house."
And Jesus could do no deed of power there,
except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.
And Jesus was amazed at their unbelief.
Then he went about among the villages teaching.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time I)

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
Amen.

May he let his face shine upon you
and show you his mercy.
Amen.

May he turn his countenance towards you
and give you his 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 I, Roman Missal p. 714)