

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Twenty-Seventh Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

6 October 2024



### Collect

Almighty ever-living God,  
who in the abundance of your kindness  
surpass the merits and the desires of those who entreat you,  
pour out your mercy upon us  
to pardon what conscience dreads  
and to give what prayer does not dare to ask.  
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

Just four months after the conclusion of the Synod on the Family in October 2015, Pope Francis issued his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of Love*. Here are two short extracts, the first from #62, the second from #308. They go hand in hand.

“The Synod Fathers noted that Jesus, ‘in speaking of God’s original plan for man and woman, reaffirmed the indissoluble union between them, even stating that “it was for your hardness of heart that Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so” (Mt 19:8).”

“I understand those who prefer a more rigorous pastoral care which leaves no room for confusion. But I sincerely believe that Jesus wants a Church attentive to the goodness which the Holy Spirit sows in the midst of human weakness, a Mother who, while clearly expressing her objective teaching, ‘always does what good she can, even if in the process, her shoes get soiled by the mud of the street.’

“The Church’s pastors, in proposing to the faithful the full ideal of the Gospel and the Church’s teaching, must also help them to treat the weak with compassion, avoiding aggravation or unduly harsh or hasty judgements. The Gospel itself tells us not to judge or condemn (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37).”

## A reading from the book of Genesis 2:18–24

The Lord God said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helpmate.' So from the soil the Lord God fashioned all the wild beasts and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild beasts. But no helpmate suitable for man was found for him. So the Lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep. And while he slept, he took one of his ribs and enclosed it in flesh. The Lord God built the rib he had taken from the man into a woman, and brought her to the man. The man exclaimed:

'This at last is bone from my bones  
and flesh from my flesh!  
This is to be called woman,  
for this was taken from man.'

This is why a man leaves his father and mother and joins himself to his wife, and they become one body.

## First Reading

The account of creation found second in the book of Genesis is considered the older of the two. It presents the Creator in more human terms and deals with issues of the human condition in a more down-to-earth way. It is one thing, of course, to summarise its contents, but what light they shed on how human beings are to live today is much less clear.

Where the lectionary picks up the story, the man has already been made from the dust of the earth and had life breathed into him. He has been placed in the garden of delight, been forbidden to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, has named all the animals and found himself to be without a helpmate. The woman is made from a rib taken from him and encased in flesh. They are of the same stuff and are destined to become one flesh. Nonetheless an element of gender and role differentiation has been introduced. They are man and woman, man and wife. Whether the story is to be interpreted today as providing a case for male priority and authority or for gender equality is open to robust debate.

Readers, as always with a controversial text (there's a much more difficult gospel passage to follow), have the responsibility of proclaiming the word of God as clearly, intelligibly and as engagingly as possible. This is an ancient story that comes alive in every generation.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 127

**R.** May the Lord bless us  
all the days of our lives.

O blessed are those who fear the Lord  
and walk in his ways!  
by the labour of your hands you shall eat.  
You will be happy and prosper. **R.**

Your wife will be like a fruitful vine  
in the heart of your house;  
your children like shoots of the olive,  
around your table. **R.**

Indeed thus shall be blessed  
the man who fears the Lord.  
May the Lord bless you from Zion  
in a happy Jerusalem  
all the days of your life!  
May you see your children's children.  
On Israel, peace! **R.**

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 127/128 is located in the midst of Psalms 119/120–133/134, generally called Songs of Ascent. These are short hymns suited to serve as chants for pilgrims on their way up to Jerusalem, though this use cannot be historically verified. The whole of Psalm 127/128 is used as the responsorial psalm.

The response, adapted from lines in the third stanza, is broad in scope. It seems to be inclusive of all people at all times. Its meaning, however, is quickly narrowed down to typical adult males who provide for the family by the work of their hands. Such a man is blessed with a fruitful wife and plentiful children. Happiness, prosperity and a flourishing family are all signs of divine bounty for him, and by extension for the people of Jerusalem. This is the perspective of the male-dominated social order of the day. Readers should respect the poetry of the short lines and also take care with the unusual seven-line stanza at the end.

### **A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 2:9–11**

We see in Jesus one who was for a short while made lower than the angels and is now crowned with glory and splendour because he submitted to death; by God's grace he had to experience death for all mankind.

As it was his purpose to bring a great many of his sons into glory, it was appropriate that God, for whom everything exists and through whom everything exists, should make perfect, through suffering, the leader who would take them to their salvation. For the one who sanctifies, and the ones who are sanctified, are of the same stock; that is why he openly calls them brothers.

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

**10:2–16**

Some Pharisees approached Jesus and asked, 'Is it against the law for a man to divorce his wife?' They were testing him. He answered them, 'What did Moses command you?' 'Moses allowed us' they said 'to draw up a writ of dismissal and so to divorce.' Then Jesus said to them, 'It was because you were so unteachable that he wrote this commandment for you. But from the beginning of creation God made them male and female. This is why a man must leave father and mother, and the two become one body. They are no longer two, therefore, but one body. So then, what God has united, man must not divide.' Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them. 'The man who divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another she is guilty of adultery too.'

[People were bringing little children to him, for him to touch them. The disciples turned them away, but when Jesus saw this he was indignant and said to them, 'Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' Then he put his arms round them, laid his hands on them and gave them his blessing.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

### **Second Reading**

The majestic opening verses of the letter to the Hebrews are allocated to the Day Mass on Christmas Day. In effect, they are rarely heard. Our series of seven readings from Hebrews begins in chapter 2. Most of this lengthy work is in the form of a highly stylised homily rather than a letter. Its author, date and place of composition, and intended recipients are unknown. It is written in sophisticated Greek by someone who was entirely *au fait* with Jewish scripture and modes of interpretation and with Greek philosophy. It appears to be addressed to Jewish Christians in danger of lapsing from their faith and succumbing to nostalgia for Temple worship. The author argues at length that Christ's priesthood and sacrifice are superior to the old and that through Christ's divine and human nature the faithful have direct access to God. The work makes extensive use of both theological argument and moral exhortation. All this makes it a challenging text for contemporary Christians.

Some of the letter's themes are evident in today's short extract – Jesus' divine glory and mortal suffering, his leadership, the notion of perfection, and human solidarity with Jesus. Since this is the first passage from a new and demanding work, readers will do well to prepare it carefully. They will see that the bulk of the reading is composed of two long and complex sentences. These will need to be delivered unhurriedly and with as much clarity as possible if the assembly is to navigate its way through the argument. Readers should make sure they have everyone's attention before proceeding with the proclamation. Those who have access to the NRSV lectionary will see that the text is set out in helpful sense lines and is rendered inclusively.

### **Gospel**

Under the law of Moses, a man could divorce and dismiss his wife if "she has not pleased him and he has found some impropriety of which to accuse her" (Dt 24:1). In later ages, rabbis ventured diverse opinions as to what might constitute such grounds for divorce. On the face of it, it appears they could be extraordinarily arbitrary. Wives were not accorded the same freedom to act.

Mark's account of Jesus' teaching on divorce goes to the other extreme and, unlike Matthew's (5:32), allows for no exceptions. Jesus declares the original divine intention to be that man and woman, once they become one flesh, would never be humanly separated. The question of grounds for divorce is therefore irrelevant in this exchange. In a way that might be little appreciated in the circumstances, Jesus treats woman and man equally with regard to the prohibition on divorce.

The full version of the gospel reading goes on to record Jesus' teaching about welcoming children and the kingdom of God. Children are to be welcomed because the kingdom belongs to them. The kingdom is to be welcomed either as one would welcome a child or as a child welcomes the kingdom – either interpretation seems possible.

These are challenging teachings to deliver, given the controversy that still rages about divorce, remarriage and communion and the scandal of how children have been abused rather than welcomed. Nonetheless, in this case proclaiming the word is an easier task than preaching it.

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.

**TWENTY-SEVENTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME**

**FIRST READING (NRSV)**

**A reading from the book of Genesis 2:18–24**

The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground,  
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,  
and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.  
Then the Lord God said,  
"It is not good that the man should be alone;  
I will make him a helper as his partner."  
So out of the ground  
the Lord God formed every animal of the field  
and every bird of the air;  
and brought them to the man to see what he would call them;  
and whatever the man called every living creature,  
that was its name.  
The man gave names to all cattle,  
and to the birds of the air;  
and to every animal of the field;  
but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.  
So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man,  
and he slept;  
then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.  
And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man  
he made into a woman and brought her to the man.  
Then the man said,  
"This at last is bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;  
this one shall be called Woman,  
for out of Man this one was taken."  
Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother  
and clings to his wife,  
and they become one flesh.

**SECOND READING (NRSV)**

**A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 2:9–11**

We do indeed see Jesus,  
who for a little while was made lower than the angels,  
now crowned with glory and honour  
because of the suffering of death,  
so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone  
It was fitting that God,  
for whom and through whom all things exist,  
in bringing many children to glory,  
should make the pioneer of their salvation  
perfect through sufferings.  
For the one who sanctifies and those who are sanctified  
all have one Father.  
For this reason  
Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters.

## GOSPEL (NRSV)

### A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 10:2–16

Some Pharisees came, and to test Jesus they asked,  
"Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?"  
Jesus answered them, "What did Moses command you?"  
They said,  
"Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of dismissal  
and to divorce her."  
But Jesus said to them,  
"Because of your hardness of heart  
he wrote this commandment for you.  
But from the beginning of creation,  
'God made them male and female.'  
'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother  
and be joined to his wife,  
and the two shall become one flesh.'  
So they are no longer two, but one flesh.  
Therefore what God has joined together; let no one separate."  
Then in the house the disciples asked him again about this matter.  
Jesus said to them,  
"Whoever divorces his wife and marries another  
commits adultery against her;  
and if she divorces her husband and marries another;  
she commits adultery."  
[People were bringing little children to him  
in order that Jesus might touch them;  
and the disciples spoke sternly to them.  
But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them,  
"Let the little children come to me;  
do not stop them:  
for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.  
Truly I tell you,  
whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child  
will never enter it."  
And Jesus took them up in his arms,  
laid his hands on them, and blessed them.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time VI)

May God bless us with every heavenly blessing,  
make us always holy and pure in his sight,  
pour out in abundance upon us the riches of his glory,  
and teach us with the words of truth;  
may he instruct us in the Gospel of salvation,  
and ever endow us with fraternal charity.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

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 VI, Roman Missal p. 717)