

3RD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – 26 JANUARY 2025



COLLECT

Almighty ever-living God,
direct our actions according to your good pleasure,
that in the name of your beloved Son
we may abound in good works.
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 REFLECTIONS

Today is Australia Day. It is a good opportunity to pray for the nation, asking God to help us become a more just, harmonious and respectful society. While a parish might choose to use the prayer texts from the Missal, there seems to be no good reason to change the texts of the Lectionary. These readings are eminently suitable for this day. Paul's image of the parts of the body, each working to complement the others, is a beautiful way of thinking about Australia. Likewise in the Gospel, Jesus' reading from the prophet Isaiah offers a vision of social justice which is a most appropriate way to speak of our hopes for our homeland – as indeed did Jesus for his home territory in Nazareth in Galilee.

Openness to the working of the Holy Spirit is important as we seek God's guidance in Australia. It is a valuable lesson the Church has been learning through the new approach of synodality. As Pope Francis wrote in 2013, *There is no greater freedom than that of allowing oneself to be guided by the Holy Spirit, renouncing the attempt to plan and control everything to the last detail, and instead letting him enlighten, guide and direct us, leading us wherever he wills* (*The Joy of the Gospel* 280).

A reading from the book of Nehemiah 8:2–6, 8–10

Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, consisting of men, women, and children old enough to understand. This was the first day of the seventh month. On the square before the Water Gate, in the presence of the men and women, and children old enough to understand, he read from the book from early morning till noon; all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a wooden dais erected for the purpose. In full view of all the people – since he stood higher than all the people – Ezra opened the book; and when he opened it all the people stood up. Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God, and all the people raised their hands and answered, ‘Amen! Amen!’; then they bowed down and, face to the ground, prostrated themselves before the Lord. And Ezra read from the Law of God, translating and giving the sense, so that the people understood what was read.

Then Nehemiah – His Excellency – and Ezra, priest and scribe (and the Levites who were instructing the people) said to all the people, ‘This day is sacred to the Lord your God. Do not be mournful, do not weep.’ For the people were all in tears as they listened to the words of the Law.

He then said, ‘Go, eat the fat, drink the sweet wine, and send a portion to the man who has nothing prepared ready. For this day is sacred to our Lord. Do not be sad: the joy of the Lord is your stronghold.’

Responsorial Psalm Ps 18:8–10, 15

R. Your words, Lord, are spirit and life.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
it revives the soul.

The rule of the Lord is to be trusted,
it gives wisdom to the simple. **R.**

The precepts of the Lord are right,
they gladden the heart.

The command of the Lord is clear,
it gives light to the eyes. **R.**

The fear of the Lord is holy,
abiding for ever.

The decrees of the Lord are truth
and all of them just. **R.**

May the spoken words of my mouth,
the thoughts of my heart,
win favour in your sight,

O Lord, my rescuer, my rock! **R.**

First Reading

Ezra is the perfect model for readers on the parish roster – imagine your reading lasted from early morning till noon! But what is really astounding is not the length of the reading; it is what Ezra is able to call forth from the assembly. The people raise their hands in praise and bow down in adoration. He reads in such a way that the text is understood by the people. He moves them to tears.

Reflect on your ministry of proclamation. It is not just a matter of reading the words fluently. It is understanding the meaning and communicating that to the assembly. This is a wonderful service to offer – to let God speak to people through your mouth.

This strong and dramatic narrative, filled with emotion and devotion, should be a delight to read. It emphasises the importance of the Scriptures in the spiritual life. For us Christians, it is Sunday which is the day sacred to our Lord, the day on which people have the opportunity to hear about the wonderful works that God does for us.

Responsorial Psalm

This section of Psalm 18/19 is in complete harmony with the reading from Nehemiah. It celebrates the word of the Lord as a treasure of wisdom which bestows life, gladness, light, truth and justice. God blesses us in the words of Scripture. The verses are arranged regularly in couplets. Take them thoughtfully and use pause well.

The response is taken, exceptionally, from the Gospel of John (6:63) where it is part of the famous ‘bread of life’ discourse.

The final stanza is a beautiful prayer which a cantor/reader might like to say to themselves before beginning their proclamation and might even memorise as a regular prayer for their ministry.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to the Corinthians 12:12–30

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink. Nor is the body to be identified with any one of its many parts.

[If the foot were to say, 'I am not a hand and so I do not belong to the body,' would that mean that it stopped being part of the body? If the ear were to say, 'I am not an eye, and so I do not belong to the body,' would that mean that it was not a part of the body? If your whole body was just one eye, how would you hear anything? If it was just one ear, how would you smell anything?

Instead of that, God put all the separate parts into the body on purpose. If all the parts were the same, how could it be a body? As it is, the parts are many but the body is one. The eye cannot say to the hand, 'I do not need you,' nor can the head say to the feet, 'I do not need you.'

What is more, it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones; and it is the least honourable parts of the body that we clothe with the greatest care. So our more improper parts get decorated in a way that our more proper parts do not need. God has arranged the body so that more dignity is given to the parts which are without it, and so that there may not be disagreements inside the body, but that each part may be equally concerned for all the others. If one part is hurt, all parts are hurt with it. If one part is given special honour, all parts enjoy it.]

Now you together are Christ's body; but each of you is a different part of it. [In the Church, God has given the first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers; after them, miracles, and after them the gift of healing; helpers, good leaders, those with many languages. Are all of them apostles, or all of them prophets, or all of them teachers? Do they all have the gift of miracles, or all have the gift of healing? Do all speak strange languages, and all interpret them?]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Second Reading

It is good to see parts of the Bible that are funny. Paul is having great fun with this metaphor of the body and so should the reader and the assembly this week. The foot and the hand are having a conversation, the ear and the eye. What fun a cartoonist would have with these delightful visual images: *If your whole body was just one eye, how would you hear anything? If it was just one ear, how would you smell anything?* This is followed by an outrageous discussion of the way we clothe and decorate the 'least honourable' parts of the body most carefully.

What an extraordinary way to communicate the message about the way we work together, cooperatively, in the Church! There is also a strong message about the way we include and respect the weaker or more vulnerable members of the community. Ministry is mutually supportive and focussed on the good of the whole. The reading is a song to diversity and to unity.

This is a passage that can be read rather theatrically, flamboyantly even. It certainly should not be a deadpan recitation. It will be such a delightful challenge for the reader and the assembly that it would be a pity to choose the shorter version.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 1:1-4; 4:14-21

Seeing that many others have undertaken to draw up accounts of the events that have taken place among us, exactly as these were handed down to us by those who from the outset were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, I in my turn, after carefully going over the whole story from the beginning, have decided to write an ordered account for you, Theophilus, so that your Excellency may learn how well founded the teaching is that you have received. Jesus, with the power of the Spirit in him, returned to Galilee; and his reputation spread throughout the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and everyone praised him. He came to Nazara, where he had been brought up, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day as he usually did. He stood up to read, and they handed him the scroll of the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling the scroll he found the place where it is written:

The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me. He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them, 'This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.'

Gospel

Today's gospel begins with Luke's prologue (1:1-4). It is one very long and complex sentence which will require study and careful phraseology if its sense is to be communicated. A significant pause should follow.

The main part of the gospel is the launch of Jesus' prophetic mission (4:14-21). It takes place in his hometown. There is a nice tension in the story as Jesus goes to the synagogue and then as he rolls up the scroll and begins to speak.

The power of the Spirit is in him and this is exactly how his citation from Isaiah begins. He presents a glorious vision of the reign of God which he is inaugurating in word and action. These lines provide something which we can aim for and pray for in Australia today – lifting up the oppressed, drawing in those on the margins, working for recognition and justice for all.

CONCLUDING PRAYER

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)

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 IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Nehemiah 8:2-6, 8-10

The priest Ezra brought the law before the assembly,
both men and women
and all who could hear with understanding.
This was on the first day of the seventh month.
He read from it facing the square before the Water Gate
from early morning until midday,
in the presence of the men and the women
and those who could understand;
and the ears of all the people were attentive
to the book of the law.
The scribe Ezra stood on a wooden platform
that had been made for the purpose.

And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people,
for he was standing above all the people;
and when he opened it, all the people stood up.
Then Ezra blessed the Lord, the great God,
and all the people answered,
“Amen, Amen,” lifting up their hands.
Then they bowed their heads
and worshipped the Lord with their faces to the ground.

So the Levites read from the book,
from the law of God, with interpretation.
They gave the sense,
so that the people understood the reading.
And Nehemiah, who was the governor;
and Ezra the priest and scribe,
and the Levites who taught the people
said to all the people,
“This day is holy to the Lord your God;
do not mourn or weep.” For all the people wept
when they heard the words of the law.
Then Ezra said to them,
“Go your way, eat the fat and drink sweet wine
and send portions of them
to those for whom nothing is prepared,
for this day is holy to our Lord;
and do not be grieved,
for the joy of the Lord is your strength.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 19.7, 8, 9, 14 (R. Jn 6.63)

R. Yours words, Lord, are spirit and life.

The law of the Lord is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the decrees of the Lord are sure,
making wise the simple. R.

The precepts of the Lord are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of the Lord is clear,
enlightening the eyes. R.

The fear of the Lord is pure,
enduring forever;
the ordinances of the Lord are true
and righteous altogether. R.

Let the words of my mouth
and the meditation of my heart
be acceptable to you,
O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. R.

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians 12:12–30

Just as the body is one and has many members,
and all the members of the body, though many, are one body,
so it is with Christ.

For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body
-- Jews or Greeks, slaves or free --
and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.

Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many.

[If the foot would say,
"Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,"
that would not make it any less a part of the body.

And if the ear would say,
"Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,"
that would not make it any less a part of the body.
If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be?
If the whole body were hearing,
where would the sense of smell be?

But as it is, God arranged the members in the body,
each one of them, as he chose.

If all were a single member, where would the body be?
As it is, there are many members, yet one body.
The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you,"
nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

On the contrary,
the members of the body
that seem to be weaker are indispensable,
and those members of the body that we think less honourable
we clothe with greater honour,
and our less respectable members
are treated with greater respect;
whereas our more respectable members do not need this.

But God has so arranged the body,
giving the greater honour to the inferior member,
that there may be no dissension within the body,
but the members may have the same care for one another.
If one member suffers, all suffer together with it;
if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.]

Now you are the body of Christ
and individually members of it.

[And God has appointed in the church first apostles,
second prophets, third teachers;
then deeds of power, then gifts of healing,
forms of assistance, forms of leadership,
various kinds of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets?
Are all teachers? Do all work miracles?
Do all possess gifts of healing?
Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret?]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Luke 1:1–4; 4:14–21

Since many have undertaken
to set down an orderly account
of the events that have been fulfilled among us,
just as they were handed on to us
by those who from the beginning
were eyewitnesses and servants of the word,
I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly
account for you,
most excellent Theophilus,
so that you may know the truth concerning the things
about which you have been instructed.

Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee,
and a report about him spread
through all the surrounding country.
He began to teach in their synagogues
and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth,
where he had been brought up,
Jesus went to the synagogue on the sabbath day,
as was his custom.

He stood up to read,
and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him.
He unrolled the scroll
and found the place where it was written:
“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”

And Jesus rolled up the scroll,
gave it back to the attendant, and sat down.
The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then Jesus began to say to them,
“Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”