

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER— 25 MAY 2025



COLLECT

Grant, almighty God,
that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion these days of joy,
which we keep in honour of the risen Lord,
and that what we relive in remembrance
we may always hold to in what we do.
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

The structure of the liturgical season of Easter is based on the chronology of the Acts of the Apostles. The Risen Christ remains with the disciples for 40 days until he is taken from their sight in the Ascension; then after 50 days, the Holy Spirit comes with power at Pentecost. But we saw that the gospels also give other models. In the gospel for the Second Sunday of Easter, Christ stands in the midst of the disciples on the day of the resurrection itself; he greets them with peace, he sends them to continue his own mission in the world, and then breathes on them to bestow the Holy Spirit to give them power. We see all this occurring also in Luke's gospel which we read next week for the Ascension of the Lord. The one event of the Paschal Mystery encompasses both Jesus' glorious resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Today's gospel (taken from the Last Supper discourse) references the Ascension and the giving of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The first reading also has an astounding claim for the work of the Holy Spirit. It dovetails with an important theme that has been developing in the Church over the last decade, namely synodality and the work of discerning what the Spirit is saying to the Church.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 15:1–2, 22–29

Some men came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, ‘Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved.’ This led to disagreement, and after Paul and Barnabas had a long argument with these men it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.

Then the apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:

‘The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some of our members have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from us, and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written in this letter. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.’

Responsorial Psalm Ps 66:2–3, 5–6, 8

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!
or

R. Alleluia.

O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help. **R.**

Let the nations be glad and exult
for you rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth. **R.**

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
May God still give us his blessing
till the ends of the earth revere him. **R.**

First Reading

One of the greatest challenges for the early Church was to refocus its mission from Jewish communities to the broader Gentile communities in the Roman empire. The most pressing issue for them to resolve was the extent to which those who became followers of Christ needed to follow the provisions of the Jewish law, circumcision being the most emblematic.

From today’s reading, it appears to have been resolved very easily. But this was not the case – as the omitted verses (15:3-21) demonstrate. However the decision is clear. Beyond a few basics, Gentile Christians do *not* have to follow the details of the Jewish law. We have already seen this unfolding in practice as the Gentile mission expanded.

The most amazing expression in the letter announcing the decision is this: *It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves...* It is a collaborative process! It has been a process of discernment which is not just parliamentary debate, but rather a respectful listening to one another and, by silence and prayer, to God. In today’s Church, we are exploring what this means under the banner of ‘synodality’. The way the early Church came to a decision is a helpful model of how we ought to proceed.

For the reader, the storyline unfolds with strong narrative direction. This will make it easy to proclaim. But care should be taken to check unfamiliar names in the pronunciation guide.

Responsorial Psalm

The whole of Psalm 66/67 serves as the responsorial psalm, except for verse 7 which identifies this as a thanksgiving for the harvest. Verse 4 is the response (repeated in verse 6).

The response and the chorus-like repetition of “the nations,” “the peoples” and “the earth” respond well to the affirmation of the Christian mission to the Gentiles as presented in the Acts of the Apostles.

The tone of the psalm is joyful; it petitions God for light, help and blessing, for justice and fairness. The reader/cantor should be able to enter easily into the psalm’s upbeat spirit and lead the assembly in joyful praise.

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse 21:10–14, 22–23

In the spirit, the angel took me to the top of an enormous high mountain and showed me Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down from God out of heaven. It had all the radiant glory of God and glittered like some precious jewel or crystal-clear diamond. The walls of it were of a great height, and had twelve gates; at each of the twelve gates there was an angel, and over the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; on the east there were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. The city walls stood on twelve foundation stones, each one of which bore the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

I saw that there was no temple in the city since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple, and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John 14:23–29

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him
and make our home with him.
Those who do not love me do not keep my words.
And my word is not my own;
it is the word of the one who sent me.
I have said these things to you
while still with you;
but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all I have said to you.
Peace I bequeath to you,
my own peace I give you,
a peace the world cannot give,
this is my gift to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
You heard me say:
I am going away, and shall return.
If you loved me you would have been glad to know
that I am going to the Father,
for the Father is greater than I.
I have told you this now, before it happens,
so that when it does happen you may believe.’

Second Reading

The phrase *the radiant glory of God* occurs twice in this reading. The reading describes the kingdom of heaven where Christ, the Lamb of God, is enthroned, and where one day we hope to join the risen Christ. God and the Lamb fill the place with bright light, making the sun or moon unnecessary. At the Easter Vigil by the paschal candle, the risen Christ was acclaimed as the light of the world.

The key symbol of the kingdom of heaven – also encountered in last week’s Apocalypse reading – is the ‘New Jerusalem’. This time it is presented as a jewel. The references to the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles present the new Jerusalem as the destiny of all God’s people, both of the old and new covenants. All are exposed to the full and direct presence of God.

The reader will not be able to explain the significance of this text, but should be able to describe for the assembly a glittering and radiant vision.

Gospel

This is a beautiful part of a long and tender farewell discourse which the Gospel of John puts on Jesus’ lips at the Last Supper. The whole is so rich!

The passage begins with an affirmation that Jesus and the Father will love and come to make their home with those who take Jesus’ teaching to heart. What Jesus teaches comes from the Father. Jesus concludes by speaking of his departure. He assures the disciples that he is going to the Father, so they ought not be troubled or afraid – they should be glad!

In between, there is the promise of gifts. Firstly, there is the gift of the Holy Spirit from the Father who will be their guide to the way of Christ. Secondly, Christ bequeaths them the gift of peace, a peace the world cannot give.

These strong words of consolation help the liturgical assembly to prepare for the Ascension next Sunday and Pentecost the week after, just as they prepared the disciples for their missionary task after Jesus’ death and resurrection.

BLESSING FOR EASTER

May God, who by the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son
was pleased to confer on us
the gift of redemption and of adoption,
give us gladness by his blessing.

Amen.

May he, by whose redeeming work
we have received the gift of everlasting freedom,
make us heirs to an eternal inheritance.

Amen.

And may we, who have already risen with Christ
in Baptism through faith,
by living in a right manner on this earth,
be united with him in the homeland of heaven.

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 Easter Time, Roman Missal p. 712)

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.

SIXTH SUNDAY OF EASTER

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 15:1–2, 22–29

Certain individuals came down from Judea
and were teaching the brothers,
“Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses,
you cannot be saved.”
And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension
and debate with them,
Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed
to go up to Jerusalem to discuss this question
with the apostles and the elders.

Then the apostles and the elders,
with the consent of the whole church,
decided to choose men from among their members
and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

They sent Judas called Barabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers,
with the following letter:

“The brothers, both the apostles and the elders,
to the believers of Gentile origin
in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greetings.
Since we have heard that certain persons
who have gone out from us,
though with no instructions from us,
have said things to disturb you and have unsettled your minds,
we have decided unanimously to choose representatives
and send them to you,
along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,
who have risked their lives
for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ.
We have therefore sent Judas and Silas,
who themselves will tell you the same things by word of mouth.
For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us
to impose on you no further burden than these essentials:
that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols,
and from blood and from what is strangled,
and from fornication.
If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well.
Farewell.”

RESPONSORIAL PSALM (NRSV)

Psalm 67.1-2, 4-5, 6-7 (R.1a)

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!

or:

R. Alleluia! (*Two or three times*)

May God be gracious to us and bless us
and make his face to shine upon us,
that your way may be known upon earth,
your saving power among all nations. **R.**

Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,
for you judge the peoples with equity
and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you. **R.**

The earth has yielded its increase;
God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us;
let all the ends of the earth revere him. **R.**

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Revelation 21:10–14, 22–23

In the spirit the angel carried me away
to a great, high mountain
and showed me the holy city Jerusalem
coming down out of heaven from God.
It has the glory of God and a radiance
like a very rare jewel, like jasper; clear as crystal.

It has a great, high wall with twelve gates,
and at the gates twelve angels,
and on the gates are inscribed the names
of the twelve tribes of the Israelites;
on the east there were three gates,
on the north three gates, on the south three gates,
and on the west three gates.
And the wall of the city has twelve foundations,
and on them are the twelve names
of the twelve Apostles of the Lamb.

I saw no temple in the city;
for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.
And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it,
for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 14:23–29

Jesus said to his disciples:

“Those who love me will keep my word,
and my Father will love them,
and we will come to them and make our home with them.
Whoever does not love me does not keep my words;
and the word that you hear is not mine,
but is from the Father who sent me.

I have said these things to you while I am still with you.
But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything,
and remind you of all that I have said to you.

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.
Do not let your hearts be troubled,
and do not let them be afraid.

You heard me say to you,
‘I am going away, and I am coming to you.’
If you loved me,
you would rejoice that I am going to the Father,
because the Father is greater than I.
And now I have told you this before it occurs,
so that when it does occur, you may believe.”