

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

30 August 2020



Collect

God of might, giver of every good gift,
put into our hearts the love of your name,
so that, by deepening our sense of reverence,
you may nurture in us what is good
and, by your watchful care,
keep safe what you have nurtured.
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 and Jesus conspire together today to present us with tough teaching. Paul counsels the Romans “not to model yourselves on the behaviour of the world . . . but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind”. Jesus rebukes Peter “because the way you think is not God’s way but man’s”.

The choice is put before us. Do we allow ourselves to take the easy path of conformity with “the way of the world”, or do we choose the way of Jesus which he warns is a way of the cross? Paul and Jesus make it clear that we do not accomplish this by our own efforts. It is by letting go of the life we imagine we have, Jesus says, that we will find true life. And Paul speaks of our minds being renewed and remodelled from within. The question is whether we will take the risk of “letting go and letting God”.

Few of us are likely to experience the anguish that the prophet Jeremiah suffered for the sake of the word, but the testimony of his courage echoes down through the ages, even to us.

A reading from the book of Jeremiah 20:7–9

You have seduced me, Lord, and I have let myself be seduced;
you have overpowered me: you were the stronger.
I am a daily laughing-stock,
everybody's butt.
Each time I speak the word, I have to howl
and proclaim: 'Violence and ruin!'
The word of the Lord has meant for me
insult, derision, all day long.
I used to say, 'I will not think about him,
I will not speak in his name any more.'
Then there seemed to be a fire burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones.
The effort to restrain it wearied me,
I could not bear it.

First Reading

Jeremiah's cry is one of the most shocking texts in the whole of the scriptures. It is as much a cry against God as it is a cry to God. Jeremiah accuses God of having seduced him into his calling. More than that, Jeremiah charges God with having overpowered him. This is the language of violent sexual assault. Jeremiah feels he has been compelled to surrender to God's demands.

This heart-rending lament is one of several such complaints in the book of the prophet Jeremiah. He had been called to preach an unwelcome word at a time of national crisis. Jerusalem is under siege and about to fall. Jeremiah's advice to submit to the Babylonian forces earns him powerful enemies. As a result he suffers ridicule, rejection and persecution; attempts are made on his life.

The reading is confronting right from the start. It begins abruptly. We have no time to ready ourselves for the strength of Jeremiah's angry complaint. Nor are we given any respite. The outburst continues right through until the final desperate words, "I could not bear it".

Readers may be tempted to soften the impact of this sustained assault. Some may go to the other extreme and over-dramatise, but there's no escaping the fact that the language is strong and the feeling is intense. What readers need to do is to identify with Jeremiah's pain and suffering, and proclaim his heartfelt lament with fidelity to the words and the emotion they bear.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 62:2–6, 8–9

R. My soul is thirsting for you, O Lord my God.

O God, you are my God, for you I long;
for you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you
like a dry, weary land without water. **R.**

So I gaze on you in the sanctuary
to see your strength and your glory.

For your love is better than life,
my lips will speak your praise. **R.**

So I will bless you all my life,
in your name I will lift up my hands.
My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
my mouth shall praise you with joy. **R.**

For you have been my help;
in the shadow of your wings I rejoice.

My soul clings to you;
your right hand holds me fast. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

The tone of the responsorial psalm is quite different from the reading that precedes it. Psalm 62/63 breathes a peaceful spirit of longing and trust. It is altogether calmer than the agitated outburst we heard from Jeremiah.

Nonetheless the response – adapted from the opening lines of the psalm – is full of feeling. Thirst is a universal human experience. Our need for water is insistent, our survival depends on it. Thirst is thus an entirely apt metaphor for our yearning for God. The verses take us into a realm of confidence, gratitude and praise. They assure us that our desire for God will be fully satisfied. They should be proclaimed in a spirit of trust and peace.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans 12:1–2

Think of God's mercy, my brothers, and worship him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a holy sacrifice, truly pleasing to God. Do not model yourselves on the behaviour of the world around you, but let your behaviour change, modelled by your new mind. This is the only way to discover the will of God and know what is good, what it is that God wants, what is the perfect thing to do.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 16:21–27

Jesus began to make it clear to his disciples that he was destined to go to Jerusalem and suffer grievously at the hands of the elders and chief priests and scribes, to be put to death and to be raised up on the third day. Then, taking him aside, Peter started to remonstrate with him. 'Heaven preserve you, Lord,' he said. 'This must not happen to you.' But he turned and said to Peter, 'Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle in my path, because the way you think is not God's way but man's.'

Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, let him renounce himself and take up his cross and follow me. For anyone who wants to save his life will lose it; but anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it. What, then, will a man gain if he wins the whole world and ruins his life? Or what has a man to offer in exchange for his life?

'For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father with his angels, and, when he does, he will reward each one according to his behaviour.'

Second Reading

The opening verses of chapter 12 mark the beginning of another major section in the letter to the Romans. For the last three Sundays we have read extracts from chapters 9–11, Paul's drawn-out debate on the plight of his fellow Israelites in the new era of grace. Now Paul turns his attention to the demands of Christian living. This will occupy him for the next three and a half chapters.

The reading for today serves as a kind of overture to what follows. The whole thrust of the letter so far has been to extol the gratuitous mercy of God made manifest in Christ and offered to all. The question arises as to what effect this will have on people's lives.

Paul calls on the Romans to lead transformed lives. Their behaviour is no longer to be dictated by "the world around you" but by the mind of Christ within. Flesh-and-blood living guided by this "new mind" will become a "holy sacrifice", offering God true worship. In the process these Christian believers will come to know "what is good, what it is that God wants, and what is the perfect thing to do".

Provided readers take the time to study the text carefully and understand the line of Paul's thought, they should not encounter any difficulty in proclaiming this text. In effect, they are appealing to their congregations as Paul appealed to the Romans.

Gospel

Today's gospel reading might be seen as a commentary on the final verse from last Sunday's text. We heard that Jesus "gave his disciples strict orders not to tell anyone that he was the Christ". This directive, repeated elsewhere, seems to be aimed at preventing misunderstanding about the kind of messiah Jesus was. The need for it becomes evident immediately.

In the religious and political ferment of Jesus' time, there were strong expectations in the land that a messiah would arise to throw off the Roman yoke. Memories of the armed uprising of the Maccabees were still strong. Jesus is determined not to be cast in the role of a violent insurrectionist who would triumphantly restore Jewish independence. On the contrary his destiny is to suffer rejection and execution. His is the path of Isaiah's "suffering servant".

Jesus' talk of suffering and death is more than Peter can bear. Impulsive as ever, he objects. Jesus instantly takes him to task. Not only is the Messiah to endure this fate, but all who aspire to follow him must take up their cross and lose their lives. The only path to life is the way of the cross.

Jesus' teaching remains a challenge for every generation of believers. These serious words call for serious proclamation.

Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,
in whom there is no shadow of death,
save us in this time of crisis;
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;
watch over all medical people
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,
that hope may never die
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,
may shine upon us and the whole world.
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)

or

Gracious God,
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.
We pray for those in need of healing.
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain
all those who are serving in response.
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment
amidst the many choices and decisions
facing our national, community and medical leaders.
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do
to help those who are vulnerable.
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,
with all that is on our hearts,
we gather now and pray
through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)