

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twenty-Eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

10 October 2021



Collect

May your grace, O Lord, we pray,
at all times go before us and follow after
and make us always determined
to carry out 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 Commentaries

Workers in some industries these days are monitored by the minute. Their time is measured relentlessly for its economic value. The pressure to be constantly productive can be immense. It can take a huge toll on employees' health and well-being. No wonder we relish other spheres of life where time isn't evaluated in monetary terms.

In the light of this it may seem unfair to raise a question about how we spend our "free" time. Yet there's every chance we'd learn a lot from an honest audit of the time and effort we choose to invest in things. It could bring to light what we actually value rather than what we think or say we value. Further steps could lead us to reflect on what the exercise has revealed and to reassess our priorities. A final step, if we had the courage which the rich man of the gospel did not, would be to let go of what possesses us and make room for the reign of God in our lives. Even if we only get to first base, we can be sure that Jesus will look steadily at us and love us.

A reading from the book of Wisdom 7:7–11

I prayed, and understanding was given me;
I entreated, and the spirit of Wisdom came to me.
I esteemed her more than sceptres and thrones;
compared with her, I held riches as nothing.
I reckoned no priceless stone to be her peer,
for compared with her, all gold is a pinch of sand,
and beside her silver ranks as mud.
I loved her more than health or beauty,
preferred her to the light,
since her radiance never sleeps.
In her company all good things came to me,
at her hands riches not to be numbered.

First Reading

For a brief introduction to the book of Wisdom please refer back to the 13th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

Today's passage is part of a prayer for wisdom on the part of an unnamed speaker who is clearly meant to be Solomon. In the story we hear on the 17th Sunday in Year A, God invites Solomon to ask for whatever he wants. Solomon prays for "a heart to understand how to discern between good and evil" so that he can "govern this people of yours that is so great". God is so pleased that he responds: "I give you a heart wise and shrewd as none before you has had and none will have after you" (1 Kings 3:5-12).

The reading from Wisdom complements Solomon's prayer. It has a clear message: wisdom is a treasure to be sought above all other blessings. Besides, when wisdom is sought for its own sake, a wealth of other "good things" will follow.

The tone of the reading is reflective. We are being allowed to overhear the speaker's innermost thoughts. It is as if we are invited into his own sacred space. This is a text that deserves to be read with reverence and wonder.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 89:12–17

R. Fill us with your love, O Lord,
and we will sing for joy!

Make us know the shortness of our life
that we may gain wisdom of heart.
Lord, relent! Is your anger for ever?
Show pity to your servants. R.

In the morning, fill us with your love;
we shall exult and rejoice all our days.
Give us joy to balance our affliction
for the years when we knew misfortune. R.

Show forth your works to your servants;
let your glory shine on their children.
Let the favour of the Lord be upon us:
give success to the work of our hands. R.

Responsorial Psalm

Unlike the numerous psalms associated with Solomon's father David, Psalm 89/90 is the only one attributed to Moses. It is a meditation on human frailty and mortality in the spirit of the wisdom tradition. The early verses have a rather melancholic tone to them, but the final section which forms the responsorial psalm is more upbeat.

The response, adapted from the psalm, is entirely positive and confident. It combines a short prayer with the promise of joyful praise. The verses that follow convey the play of light and shadow in human experience. There is reference to shortness of life, divine anger, affliction and misfortune. But these are more than counterbalanced by the affirmation of God's pity, love, glory and favour. Overall the dominant theme is one of trust in God's readiness to answer the psalmist's prayer for "wisdom of heart".

The image of bright sunshine breaking through grey cloud may inspire the reader to do justice to the heartfelt sentiments of this psalm.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 4:12–13

The word of God is something alive and active: it cuts like any double-edged sword but more finely: it can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts. No created thing can hide from him; everything is uncovered and open to the eyes of the one to whom we must give account of ourselves.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

10:17–30

Jesus was setting out on a journey when a man ran up, knelt before him and put this question to him, 'Good master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus said to him, 'Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: You must not kill; You must not commit adultery; You must not steal; You must not bring false witness; You must not defraud; Honour your father and mother.' And he said to him, 'Master, I have kept all these from my earliest days.' Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him, and he said, 'There is one thing you lack. Go and sell everything you own and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.' But his face fell at these words and he went away sad, for he was a man of great wealth.

Jesus looked round and said to his disciples, 'How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God! The disciples were astounded by these words, but Jesus insisted, 'My children,' he said to them, 'how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.' They were more astonished than ever. 'In that case' they said to one another 'who can be saved?' Jesus gazed at them. 'For men' he said 'it is impossible, but not for God: because everything is possible for God.'

[Peter took this up. 'What about us?' he asked him. 'We have left everything and followed you.' Jesus said, 'I tell you solemnly, there is no one who has left house, brothers, sisters, father, children or land for my sake and for the sake of the gospel who will not be repaid a hundred times over, houses, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and land - not without persecutions - now in this present time and, in the world to come, eternal life.']

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

Second Reading

The opening verse of this short passage from Hebrews – “The word of God is something alive and active” – states a truth that the Catholic Church rediscovered less than a century ago. It was important enough to be quoted in #21 of Vatican II’s *Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation* and in #4 of the General Introduction to the Lectionary. It’s also implied by #7 of the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* where it says that Christ “is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in church.”

At first glance this reading may seem to suggest that the word of God is something to be feared. It pierces through to our inmost being, judges our secret thoughts and feelings, and exposes everything to the all-seeing eyes of God. As Jesus himself declared, “. . . there is nothing hidden but it must be disclosed, nothing kept secret except to be brought to light” (Mk 4:22). This needs to be counterbalanced by his assurance that “the truth will make you free” (Jn 8:32). As we hear on Christmas Day, the Word-become-flesh is the true light that enlightens us all, a light that darkness cannot overpower (Jn 1:5,9). This is liberating news.

While the reading is brief, it contains serious teaching. Almost all of it is in short units that should be allowed to speak for themselves. Readers should proclaim them with clarity and at a moderate pace to allow the congregation to engage with the vivid imagery.

Gospel

As on last Sunday, the gospel has two forms. The shorter one omits the last few verses containing Peter’s question and Jesus’ response. The longer version falls into three parts: Jesus’ public dialogue with the rich man, his private explanation to the disciples, and his positive response to Peter’s question.

The commandments that Jesus cites are all related to right dealing with other human beings; those dealing with our relationship with God are passed over. This social focus is paralleled by Jesus’ command that the man should give his wealth away to the poor. The directive that Jesus gives seems to identify the action that that the man must take “to inherit eternal life”. But the story suggests that this would be not so much an award-winning initiative on the man’s part as a letting go of what stands in the way of his personal relationship with Jesus. Mark states that “Jesus looked steadily at him and loved him”; the gift that is on offer is fellowship with Jesus.

Jesus’ private instruction of his disciples reinforces the point that it is not human endeavour that matters but the power of God, “because everything is possible for God”. Two points are worth noting in his reply to Peter. There is no mention of “father” in the hundredfold list because those who follow Jesus have only one Father. And a sobering note of realism is injected with the promise of persecution.

This gospel episode artfully marries Jesus’ uncompromising call to radical discipleship with an appealing portrayal of the human condition embodied in the rich man and in Peter.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time I)

Bow down for the blessing.

May the Lord bless us and keep us.

Amen.

May he let his face shine upon us
and show us his mercy.

Amen.

May he turn his countenance towards us
and give us his peace.

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 I, Roman Missal p. 714)