

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

26 June 2022



Collect

O God, who through the grace of adoption
chose us to be children of light,
grant, we pray,
that we may not be wrapped in the darkness of error
but always be seen to stand in the bright light of truth.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

The last Sunday before Lent this year was the 7th of Ordinary Time. Today we resume with the 13th Sunday. The intervening seasons and feasts mean that we do not hear the readings allocated to Sundays 8-12.

As a consequence, we have missed four of the six extracts from one of the most extraordinary works in the New Testament, Paul's letter to the Galatians. This is what scripture scholar N.T. Wright has to say about it: ". . . it is *Galatians* as we have it that is part of the Bible – warts and all, sharp edges and sarcastic remarks included. Perhaps, indeed, this is what 'holy scripture' really is – not a calm, serene list of truths to be learned or commands to be obeyed, but a jagged book that forces you to grow up in your thinking as you grapple with it" (*Paul: A Biography*. NY: HarperCollins, 2018, 142-43).

What got Paul so fired up? Self-proclaimed missionaries wanting to reimpose elements of the Mosaic Law on Christian believers. Paul defends the all-sufficiency of faith in Christ crucified with all the verbal weapons at his disposal. It's worth reading in full.

A reading from the first book of the Kings

19:16, 19–21

The Lord said to Elijah: ‘Go, you are to anoint Elisha son of Shaphat, of Abel Meholah, as prophet to succeed you.’

Leaving there, Elijah came to Elisha son of Shaphat as he was ploughing behind twelve yoke of oxen, he himself being with the twelfth. Elijah passed near to him and threw his cloak over him. Elisha left his oxen and ran after Elijah. ‘Let me kiss my father and mother, then I will follow you’ he said. Elijah answered, ‘Go, go back; for have I done anything to you?’ Elisha turned away, took the pair of oxen and slaughtered them. He used the plough for cooking the oxen, then gave to his men, who ate. He then rose, and followed Elijah and became his servant.

First Reading

The story of Elisha’s commissioning by the prophet Elijah as his successor has been chosen to connect with today’s gospel episode. It’s that pivotal moment in Luke’s narrative when Jesus “resolutely took the road for Jerusalem.” Shortly after this, three would-be disciples profess their desire to follow him, but Jesus dismisses each one’s good intentions with a dose of hard reality, telling the third, “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”

When Elisha wants time out to bid farewell to his parents, Elijah rebukes him impatiently. While the gospel account has Jesus turning his face to the cross that still lay in the future, in the first reading Elijah had just endured a string of extreme trials. He’d escaped the murderous intentions of Queen Jezebel, been saved from exhaustion by an angel, walked forty days and nights to the holy mountain, and met with God there “in the sound of sheer silence” (1 Kings 19:12) before being told to anoint Elisha. It’s no wonder Elijah was impatient with his protégé. In the event Elisha responds by immediately slaughtering his pair of oxen and burning the yoke to cook them. There was no chance to look back from the plough, because everything had been sacrificed.

Readers would be wise to check the pronunciation of all the proper names. Apart from that, the reading is a lively short story that weaves action and dialogue together engagingly. It should be delivered with energy.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 15:1–2, 5, 7–11

R. You are my inheritance, O Lord.

Preserve me, God, I take refuge in you.

I say to the Lord: ‘You are my God.’

O Lord, it is you who are my portion and cup;
it is you yourself who are my prize. **R.**

I will bless the Lord who gives me counsel,
who even at night directs my heart.

I keep the Lord ever in my sight:

since he is at my right hand, I shall stand firm. **R.**

And so my heart rejoices, my soul is glad;
even my body shall rest in safety.

For you will not leave my soul among the dead,
nor let your beloved know decay. **R.**

You will show me the path of life,
the fullness of joy in your presence,
at your right hand happiness for ever. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

While Psalm 15/16 begins with a petition – “Preserve me, God, I take refuge in you” – it quickly becomes a confession of faith in the goodness, trustworthiness and incomparable value of God. God is declared to be the psalmist’s “portion and cup” and “prize.” God gives wisdom, shows the path of life, and promises joy and happiness for ever.

The apostles Peter and Paul both quote from this psalm in their maiden speeches, Peter in Jerusalem on Pentecost Day (Acts 2:25-28), and later on Paul in Pisidian Antioch (13:35). Each of them uses the psalmist’s confident assertion – “For you will not leave my soul among the dead, nor let your beloved know decay” – to argue that Jesus’ resurrection had scriptural warrant. Whether these words originally reflected an intuition about life after death is open to question.

As the psalm unfolds its focus varies somewhat. Much of the time it is in the form of prayer directed to God, but there are moments, for example in the second verse, where it appears to be addressed to those gathered by. Readers need to be mindful of this subtle shift. That said, they should pray the psalm with its author’s sincerity and appreciation for God’s blessings.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Galatians**

5:1, 13–18

When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery.

My brothers, you were called, as you know, to liberty; but be careful, or this liberty will provide an opening for self-indulgence. Serve one another, rather, in works of love, since the whole of the Law is summarised in a single command: Love your neighbour as yourself. If you go snapping at each other and tearing each other to pieces, you had better watch or you will destroy the whole community.

Let me put it like this: if you are guided by the Spirit you will be in no danger of yielding to self-indulgence, since self-indulgence is the opposite of the Spirit, the Spirit is totally against such a thing, and it is precisely because the two are so opposed that you do not always carry out your good intentions. If you are led by the Spirit, no law can touch you.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Luke**

9:51–62

As the time drew near for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely took the road for Jerusalem and sent messengers ahead of him. These set out, and they went into a Samaritan village to make preparations for him, but the people would not receive him because he was making for Jerusalem. Seeing this, the disciples James and John said, 'Lord, do you want us to call down fire from heaven to burn them up?' But he turned and rebuked them, and they went off to another village.

As they travelled along they met a man on the road who said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.' Jesus answered, 'Foxes have holes and the birds of air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'

Another to whom he said, 'Follow me,' replied, 'Let me go and bury my father first.' But he answered, 'Leave the dead to bury the dead; your duty is to go and spread the news of the kingdom of God.'

Another said, 'I will follow you, sir, but first let me go and say good-bye to my people at home.' Jesus said to him, 'Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.'

Second Reading

In the earlier chapters of his passionate letter to the Galatians, Paul had invoked his apostolic authority to defend the gospel he preached. The way to salvation, he insisted, was through faith in Christ crucified. Faith was the necessary and all-sufficient means, transcending the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law. The grace of faith liberated Christian believers from the burden of observance.

Today's text focusses on the issue of Christian freedom. On the one hand, this freedom was to be firmly grasped, as Paul states categorically. "When Christ freed us, he meant us to remain free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery." On the other, it was not to be used as an excuse for self-indulgence. False liberty, he argues with vigour, is divisive and destructive. True freedom is to abide by the heart of the Law, which is to love one's neighbour as oneself, and this is what the Spirit makes possible. Just as it began, the passage ends with an emphatic declaration.

While it is by no means the most fiery part of Paul's Galatian diatribe, the reading still testifies to the depth of his feeling and the force of his convictions. Readers need to deliver it in this spirit, taking care especially with the lengthy second-last sentence (which the NRSV divides into two).

Gospel

"So, too, I set my face like flint" is what Isaiah's suffering servant declares at the end of his third lament, as we hear on Palm Sunday. His defiant declaration is paralleled in the gospel statement that Jesus "resolutely took the road for Jerusalem." Another Old Testament figure is alluded to in the earlier part of the sentence. When Luke looks beyond Jesus' death to the time when he would "be taken up to heaven," he reminds us of Elijah's being taken "up to heaven in the whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:1). This dramatic story is never read on a Sunday or feast day.

In the space of a few words, Luke weaves suffering and exaltation together and establishes the perspective that will shape not only the rest of his gospel but also its companion volume, the Acts of the Apostles. In the gospel, Jerusalem is the magnet drawing Jesus inexorably to his destiny. Then a new era opens out. Jesus' departure from earthly life signals the passage of the gospel from Jerusalem to the centre of the known world.

The rest of the reading serves to highlight Jesus' resolution. The hostile reception he gets from the Samaritans and the naïveté of the three aspiring followers put Jesus' unswerving commitment in sharp relief. This text throws down the gauntlet to present-day believers. It deserves serious delivery.

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.

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 VI, Roman Missal p. 717)