

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twenty-Second Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

28 August 2022



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,
God, for ever and ever.
Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

What do Pharisees, lawyers, tax collectors, the apostles, Martha and Mary, Zacchaeus, and the Galilean crowd and a few others have in common? At one time or another they are at a meal with Jesus. Luke makes a particular feature of Jesus' meal ministry. Each dining event is an epiphany of God's way with us.

Almost always Jesus attends as a guest, but there are three occasions when Jesus is host. The outstanding one is the last supper, when Jesus is both host and gift. The other two have associations with that eucharistic meal. When Jesus feeds the crowd in the wilderness, he takes the loaves and fish, offers a blessing, breaks and shares the food (9:16) – the very same actions as at the last supper. So too at Emmaus. When he takes the bread, says the blessing, breaks and shares it (24:30), the travellers' guest has become the host.

The eucharist is thus the epitome of Jesus' teaching today. It's a meal to which he the host invites us. It's a meal at which he gives himself to us freely and fully. We are all "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind" who can give him nothing comparable in return. Such is the grace of divine hospitality.

A reading from the book of Ecclesiasticus
3:17–20, 28–29

My son, be gentle in carrying out your business,
and you will be better loved than a lavish giver.
The greater you are, the more you should behave
humbly, and then you will find favour with the Lord;
for great though the power of the Lord is,
he accepts the homage of the humble.
There is no cure for the proud man's malady,
since an evil growth has taken root in him.
The heart of a sensible man will reflect on parables,
an attentive ear is the sage's dream.

First Reading

Still commonly referred to as the book of Ecclesiasticus, this manual of wisdom has quite a history. Originally written in Hebrew by "Jesus, son of Eleazar, son of Sirach" (50:27) around the year 200 BC, it was translated into Greek several decades later by the author's grandson. It then acquired a Latin title "Ecclesiasticus," meaning "book of the Church," around the year 200 AD. Nowadays it is often called "Sirach" after its author's forebear. It is not included among the Jewish or Protestant scriptures.

The book is largely a life-time's collection of sayings and reflections on wisdom. This makes it a kind of handbook of wisdom. In Jewish tradition, wisdom is a broad category, ranging from short practical proverbs about daily living through to sublime meditations on the divine spirit.

For Ben Sirach, wisdom is closely aligned with the Mosaic Law, though this is not evident in today's extract on the subject of humility. The virtue is extolled not merely for its earthly value but because the humble "will find favour with the Lord." The proud person, on the other hand, is a lost cause, "since an evil growth has taken root in him." The reading concludes with general approval for those who pursue wisdom by reflecting on proverbs and listening attentively.

The text is relatively straightforward once readers have adjusted to its instructional style. The wisdom that the author has distilled from life's experience should be proclaimed reflectively. The NRSV text is in inclusive language.

Responsorial Psalm **Ps 67:4–7, 10–11**

R. God, in your goodness, you have made a home for the poor.

The just shall rejoice at the presence of God,
they shall exult and dance for joy.

O sing to the Lord, make music to his name;
rejoice in the Lord, exult at his presence. **R.**

Father of the orphan, defender of the widow,
such is God in his holy place.

God gives the lonely a home to live in;
he leads the prisoners forth into freedom. **R.**

You poured down, O God, a generous rain:
when your people were starved you gave them new life.
It was there that your people found a home,
prepared in your goodness, O God, for the poor. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

The wisdom advocated in the first reading is timeless, whereas Psalm 67/68 is anchored in saving history. It is a hymn of praise for the God who has powerfully delivered Israel and established them in their homeland. Just as the humble "find favour with the Lord," so God "has made a home for the poor."

The response is adapted from the third verse of the responsorial psalm. This is the only occasion in the three-year Sunday cycle that Psalm 67/68 is used, so care will need to be taken to announce the response clearly. The text will be unfamiliar and the format, with the insertion of "in your goodness," a little unusual.

The psalmist alternates between addressing God directly and making declarations about God. The mention of music and dancing may imply that the psalm was used to accompany a festive procession. The first verse is general in character. The second alludes to the exodus and entry into the Promised Land, and the third seems to refer to the settlement of the land. Altogether the psalm is a confession of both praise and faith. It should be a joy for readers to lead.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews **12:18–19, 22–24**

What you have come to is nothing known to the senses: not a blazing fire, or a gloom turning to total darkness, or a storm; or trumpeting thunder or the great voice speaking which made everyone that heard it beg that no more should be said to them. But what you have come to is Mount Zion and the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem where the millions of angels have gathered for the festival, with the whole Church in which everyone is a 'first-born son' and a citizen of heaven. You have come to God himself, the supreme Judge, and been placed with spirits of the saints who have been made perfect; and to Jesus, the mediator who brings a new covenant.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke **14:1, 7–14**

On a sabbath day Jesus had gone for a meal to the house of one of the leading Pharisees; and they watched him closely. He then told the guests a parable, because he had noticed how they picked the places of honour. He said this, 'When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take your seat in the place of honour. A more distinguished person than you may have been invited, and the person who invited you both may come and say, "Give up your place to this man." And then, to your embarrassment, you would have to go and take the lowest place. No; when you are a guest, make your way to the lowest place and sit there, so that, when your host comes, he may say, "My friend, move up higher." In that way, everyone with you at the table will see you honoured. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and the man who humbles himself will be exalted.'

Then he said to his host, 'When you give a lunch or a dinner, do not ask your friends, brothers, relations or rich neighbours, for fear they repay your courtesy by inviting you in return. No; when you have a party, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; that they cannot pay you back means that you are fortunate, because repayment will be made to you when the virtuous rise again.'

Second Reading

This final passage from the letter to the Hebrews opens up a glorious vista of the heavenly Jerusalem, thronged with angels and saints and presided over by God and Jesus, judge and mediator respectively. It may surprise those who read the whole of this chapter to find this splendid scenario surrounded by warnings against falling away from the faith. It's a reminder that the author's fundamental purpose is to persuade his recipients not to lose heart and give up. He's not afraid to use threats to achieve his goal.

That said, the reading itself is an invitation to thrill at the sight of the heavenly realm. The new Mount Zion is a festive place of inclusion, equality and belonging. It's not like Mount Sinai where the enactment of the old covenant was accompanied by terrifying sights and sounds (Ex 19:10-25; Dt 5:22-26). The new Jerusalem is a place of peaceful, joyous ingathering, laid open by Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant and pre-eminent leader in faith.

The power of the reading lies in its vivid depiction of the two covenants. One was sealed amid fearsome phenomena, the other opened the way to a celestial paradise. Readers should relish the opportunity to convey the tumult of the first and the festivity of the second. Provided they don't stray into melodrama, there's plenty of scope here for a lively proclamation.

Gospel

Characteristically, Luke reports that Jesus had accepted an invitation to a meal, this time on the sabbath and at the house of an influential Pharisee. Perhaps word had not spread as to how uncomfortable a guest he could be. True to form, he turns the tables on his antagonists. Perceiving their penchant for social status, Jesus tells a whimsical story about the jeopardy of seeking the places of honour at table. He concludes with what appears to be a commonplace of wisdom about humility, in complete harmony with what we heard from Ben Sirach. It's also in keeping with the kind of thorough-going reversal that Luke stresses and Mary extols in her *Magnificat*.

Jesus' second piece of teaching is doubly more radical. It's one thing to be modest in one's social interaction with peers, it's altogether something else to embark on table-fellowship with riff-raff and those beyond the pale. But if that's hard to stomach, there's more to come. It's to be done purely gratuitously. The economy of favours given and favours returned is not the economy of the kingdom of God. That's one of generous hospitality offered to those poor and humble enough to accept it.

The reading progresses from the factual introduction through the parable to the concluding instruction. There's every reason to expect that a good proclamation will sustain the assembly's attention.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time IV)

May the God of all consolation order our days in his peace
and grant us the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May he free us always from every distress
and confirm our hearts in his love.

Amen.

So that on this life's journey
we may be effective in good works,
rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity,
and may come happily to eternal life.

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 IV, Roman Missal p. 716)