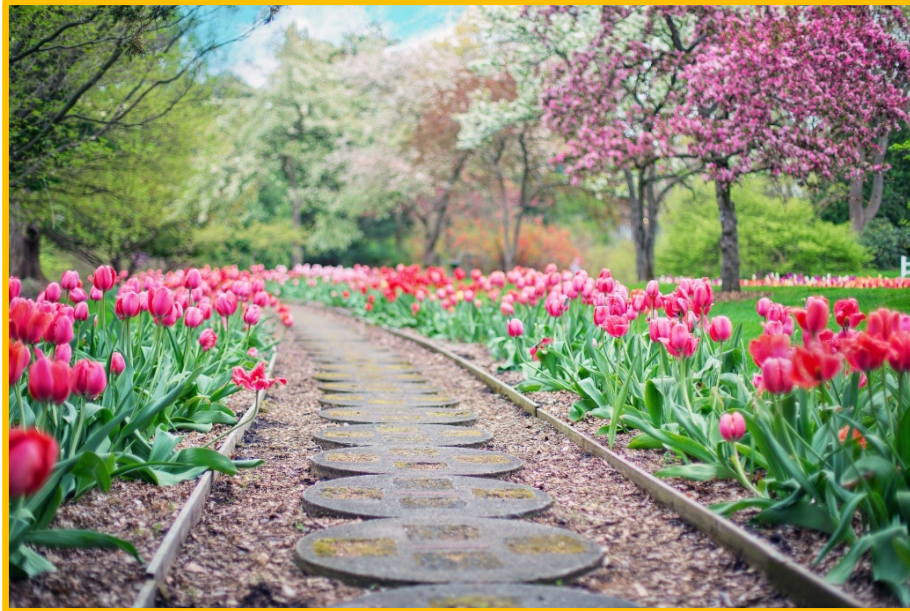


SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Fifth Sunday of Easter
10 May 2020



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us,
that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism
may, under your protective care, bear much fruit
and come to the joys of life eternal.
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

One way of approaching the Easter season is to imagine a great tree that thrusts its roots deep down in the soil even as its trunk and branches grow upwards and outwards. The hidden roots draw nourishment from deep under the earth and fuel the visible growth of the tree.

The gospel readings for the next few Sundays, taken from Jesus' farewell speech to his disciples in the gospel of John, invite us on an interior journey into the depths of our hearts. It is there that Jesus makes his home in us; it is there that the Paraclete teaches us all wisdom. As our faith is fed from deep within, the stronger is our desire to let love loose in the world.

The stories from the Acts of the Apostles take us on an outer journey. They allow us to be present at the birth of the early Church and to accompany its first steps. Under the impetus of the Holy Spirit the Christian way begins to spread. It starts to take shape for all to see.

In Eastertide the Church drinks deeply from the well-spring of the Spirit and finds fresh inspiration for its mission in the world.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

6:1–7

About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, ‘It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom; we will hand over this duty to them, and continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.’ The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith.

First Reading

One of the revolutionary features of the Christian way was its inclusiveness. Belonging to a Christian community was based on baptism, not on race or gender or any other traditional social marker. This breaking down of customary boundaries did not come about easily or quickly. The challenge it presented was at its most acute when it came to table fellowship.

This was the case in the early Christian community in Jerusalem where conflicts arose between Jewish Christians from Greek-speaking and Aramaic-speaking backgrounds. In the process it was the most vulnerable members of the community – widows – who were disadvantaged. But Luke presents this problem as the opportunity for a creative initiative of the Spirit. A new ministry emerges and the community continues to grow.

Ironically, of the seven men elected to distribute food so that the Twelve would not “neglect the word of God”, only two – Stephen and Philip – are heard of again, and that is in the role of powerful preachers, not as servants at table!

Luke’s record of the event is a lively one and should give the reader the opportunity to convey something of the energy at work in the early community. The main challenge is with the pronunciation of the seven names – readers will need to check the pronunciation guide for these. The conclusion is a general summing up that needs to be distinguished from the preceding story.

Note that the NRSV uses the word “friends” in place of “brothers”.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:1–2, 4–5, 18–19

R. Lord, let your mercy be on us,
as we place our trust in you.

or

R. Alleluia.

Ring out your joy to the Lord, O you just;
for praise is fitting for loyal hearts.
Give thanks to the Lord upon the harp,
with a ten-stringed lute sing him songs. R.

For the word of the Lord is faithful
and all his works to be trusted.
The Lord loves justice and right
and fills the earth with his love. R.

The Lord looks on those who revere him,
on those who hope in his love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine. R.

Responsorial Psalm

The verses of the responsorial psalm come from Psalm 32/33, a song in praise of the God who guides and governs all he has created. The spirit of the psalm is one of joy, confidence and gratitude. Readers who enter into this spirit should have no difficulty communicating its liveliness to the congregation. They will note a hint of the paschal mystery in the phrase “to rescue their souls from death.”

The response is taken from the very last verse of the psalm. Taken alone it might have a Lenten feel about it, but when read in the context of both the psalm and of the season, it has the assurance of Easter faith.

A reading from the first letter of St Peter 2:4–9

The Lord is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him; set yourselves close to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house. As scripture says: See how I lay in Zion a precious cornerstone that I have chosen and the man who rests his trust on it will not be disappointed. That means that for you who are believers, it is precious; but for unbelievers, the stone rejected by the builders has proved to be the keystone, a stone to stumble over, a rock to bring men down. They stumble over it because they do not believe in the word; it was the fate in store for them. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

14:1–12

Jesus said to his disciples:
'Do not let your hearts be troubled.
Trust in God still, and trust in me.
There are many rooms in my Father's house;
if there were not, I should have told you.
I am now going to prepare a place for you,
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,
I shall return to take you with me;
so that where I am you may be too.
You know the way to the place where I am going.'
Thomas said, 'Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?' Jesus said:
'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.
No one can come to the Father except through me.
If you know me, you know my Father too.
From this moment you know him and have seen him.'
Philip said, 'Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.' 'Have I been with you all this time, Philip,' said Jesus to him 'and you still do not know me?
'To have seen me is to have seen the Father,
so how can you say, "Let us see the Father"?
Do you not believe that I am in the Father
and the Father is in me?
The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself:
it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work.
You must believe me when I say
that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;
believe it on the evidence of this work, if for no other reason.
'I tell you most solemnly,
whoever believes in me
will perform the same works as I do myself,
he will perform even greater works,
because I am going to the Father.'

Second Reading

Understandably one of the aims of early Christian preachers was to find common ground with Jewish believers by interpreting Jesus' death and resurrection in terms of familiar tradition. This is reflected in texts from the Hebrew scriptures that are cited in New Testament writings.

Today's passage from 1 Peter contains two quotes from the prophet Isaiah and one from Psalm 117/118 (used for the responsorial psalm on the first two Sundays of the season), all linked by the image of a building stone. These citations are not clearly identified in the standard lectionary version but are in the NRSV; readers should make sure they know where and what they are.

Although the splendid final declaration – "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart . . ." – is not a direct quote from the Old Testament, it is compiled from Exodus 19:6 and Isaiah 43:20–21.

The reading as a whole moves from a presentation of the paradox of Jesus Christ – "the stone rejected by the builders [that] has proved to be the keystone" – to the glorious vocation of his followers who are "living stones making a spiritual house". Note that all Christians are described as "the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices . . .". The baptismal priesthood of the faithful was reaffirmed by the Second Vatican Council and is proclaimed again whenever the first of the Sunday prefaces is prayed. Readers should deliver this text with positive conviction. They should pause for a moment before giving special emphasis to the concluding verse of the passage.

Gospel

We can thank "doubting Thomas" for the cornerstone of today's gospel, Jesus' declaration that he is "the Way, the Truth and the Life". This and what leads up to it may have a familiar ring for many in the congregation. It's a text that is often read at funeral services.

It begins with words of assurance for the disciples whom Jesus had just disturbed by speaking about betrayal and denial. From this point on, for four full chapters of the gospel, Jesus opens his heart to them and to the Father. This discourse, unique to the gospel of John, is in the form of a "last testament" from a leader to his followers. After the dialogue between Jesus and Thomas and Philip that we hear today, almost all that follows is a monologue from Jesus.

Part of the appeal of John's gospel lies in the conversations it records between Jesus and others. These give the gospel a human face. However they can also be disconcerting. Often Jesus' response to a question is either quite indirect or in the form of a theological pronouncement that only raises more questions. Such is the case when Thomas asks to be shown the way Jesus is going and when Philip asks him to show them the Father. Jesus takes advantage of these pragmatic questions to offer sublime teaching. We must expect the same treatment.

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.)