

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

13th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

28 June 2020



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,
one God, for ever and ever.

Readings and Commentaries

One of the oldest and most famous baptisteries in the world lies adjacent to the basilica of St John Lateran in Rome. It contains a poetic inscription centred on the image of the baptismal font as a fertile womb teeming with new life. The poem delights in the idea of baptism as rebirth in the power of the Spirit. It can be seen as an inspired commentary on Jesus' brief word to Nicodemus about the need to be born of water and the Spirit to enter the kingdom of God (John 3:5).

For his part Paul offers the distinctly different but complementary image of the font. He presents it not as a womb but as a tomb. In Paul's mind baptism is a sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Going down into the waters of the font, the candidate dies to sin and death and rises out of them to new life with God.

These two perspectives are mutually enriching rather than contradictory. Together they set our imaginations free to gain fresh insight into this sacramental rite that is cherished by every Christian community.

A reading from the second book of the Kings 4:8–11, 14–16

One day as Elisha was on his way to Shunem, a woman of rank who lived there pressed him to stay and eat there. After this he always broke his journey for a meal when he passed that way. She said to her husband, 'Look, I am sure the man who is constantly passing our way must be a holy man of God. Let us build him a small room on the roof, and put him a bed in it, and a table and chair and lamp; whenever he comes to us he can rest there.'

One day when he came, he retired to the upper room and lay down. 'What can be done for her?' he asked. Gehazi (his servant) answered, 'Well, she has no son and her husband is old.' Elisha said, 'Call her.' The servant called her and she stood at the door. 'This time next year,' Elisha said 'you will hold a son in your arms.'

First Reading

The stories of the prophets Elijah and his successor Elisha recorded in the Old Testament books of 1 and 2 Kings are colourful and dramatic. Today's is no exception, though unfortunately we only hear a shortened version of the first part of it. Readers would do well to turn to their Bibles and find the whole tale in 2 Kings 4:8–37.

This story from the Elisha cycle looks back to one of Elijah's exploits (1 Kings 17) and ahead to events in the ministry of Jesus (Luke 7:11–17; Matthew 9:18–26) and of Paul (Acts 20:7–12). It also connects with the several biblical stories of childless women unexpectedly blessed by God with the birth of a son.

The theme of this extract is that hospitality to God's servants is richly rewarded, as Jesus declares in the final verse of today's gospel. The unnamed woman from Shunem goes to trouble and expense to provide lodging for Elisha and in return is promised a son. In the gospel Jesus assures those who offer even a cup of cold water to a disciple will receive their reward.

The reading itself is straightforward enough, except perhaps for the proper names. Readers who check the pronunciation guide will see two options for Elisha and three for Gehazi.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 88:2–3, 16–19

R. For ever I will sing the goodness of the Lord.

I will sing for ever of your love, O Lord;
through all ages my mouth will proclaim your truth.
Of this I am sure, that your love lasts for ever,
that your truth is firmly established as the
heavens. **R.**

Happy the people who acclaim such a king,
who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face,
who find their joy every day in your name,
who make your justice the source of their bliss. **R.**

For it is you, O Lord, who are the glory of their
strength;
it is by your favour that our might is exalted:
for our ruler is in the keeping of the Lord;
our king in the keeping of the Holy One of
Israel. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 88/89 is quite long. It offers praise to God for the work of creation and for the election of David and his descendants as kings. The verses for today have been selected and combined from the beginning and the body of the psalm.

The very first line of the psalm serves as the response. It captures the faith-filled attitude of the Shunemite woman. Though her story implies that she was well-to-do, her faith is that of the humble and patient poor ones of Israel. We may assume that she is promised a son because she has always been a person of thanks and praise, not that she is only now turning to God in gratitude for the assurance of a son.

Both the language and the form of the psalm are straightforward. The principal challenge for the reader is managing the rather long lines of the verses. Readers will need to resist the temptation to hurry them. The solution lies in a steady style of proclamation that enables the congregation to hear each verse as a coherent unit and offers them clear vocal and visual cues for their response.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans 6:3–4, 8–11

When we were baptised in Christ Jesus we were baptised in his death; in other words, when we were baptised we went into the tomb with him and joined him in death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the Father's glory, we too might live a new life.

But we believe that having died with Christ we shall return to life with him: Christ, as we know, having been raised from the dead will never die again. Death has no power over him any more. When he died, he died, once for all, to sin, so his life now is life with God; and in that way, you too must consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive for God in Christ Jesus.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew 10:37–42

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Anyone who prefers father or mother to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who prefers son or daughter to me is not worthy of me. Anyone who does not take his cross and follow in my footsteps is not worthy of me. Anyone who finds his life will lose it; anyone who loses his life for my sake will find it.

'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me; and those who welcome me welcome the one who sent me.

'Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet will have a prophet's reward; and anyone who welcomes a holy man because he is a holy man will have a holy man's reward.

'If anyone gives so much as a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple, then I tell you solemnly, he will most certainly not lose his reward.'

Second Reading

The early chapters of Paul's monumental letter to the Romans are concerned with God's judgement on humankind. Gentile and Jew alike are caught up in the power of sin and death. Paul now spells out the good news. In sum, Jesus Christ has died and been raised to life with God, and thus has overcome sin and death; Christians share in this victory by dying and rising with Christ in baptism. However Paul is rarely content to state his case simply and succinctly. His fertile mind is always searching to find fresh ways of expressing the mystery.

The reading for today falls into two parts because of the omission of three verses in the middle of the passage. This means, in effect, that the second part repeats in a slightly different way what has already been asserted in the first. This makes the retention of the transition word "But" a little confusing.

In contemplating this inexhaustible mystery, Paul might be compared to an art lover viewing a great painting from different angles. Readers have the opportunity to invite the congregation to discover the wealth of meaning contained in his teaching. They can do this by studying the text carefully, rehearsing it aloud a number of times, and proclaiming it in a spirit of confident faith.

Gospel

The concluding section of Jesus' second discourse in Matthew, his mission sermon to the disciples, falls into two parts. The first is full of challenge, the second full of promise.

Jesus begins by throwing down the gauntlet. He demands priority for himself over the most binding family ties. Matthew may appear to soften Luke's language about "hating" one's family members but the call remains uncompromising. And Jesus' insistence that the cross and self-sacrifice are the only path to life is inescapable; Matthew makes sure that his readers hear this hard saying again later in the gospel.

The assurances that follow arise from the intimate bond that links "little ones" and the disciples to Jesus and Jesus to the Father. Together they form a community that transcends earthly relationships. This teaching of Jesus has a warmth and appeal that counterbalances his confronting words about the cross.

Each of the two parts is made up of a series of sayings in similar format. The temptation to rush through them should be resisted. Each saying should be given its own time and emphasis. It would also be helpful if there is a distinct pause and change of tone between the two halves of the passage, allowing the congregation to appreciate the shift of focus. It is a pity that the concluding verse of the discourse (11:1) has been omitted from the lectionary.

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.)