

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

25 September 2022



Collect

O God, who manifest your almighty power above all by pardoning and showing mercy, bestow, we pray, your grace abundantly upon us and make those hastening to attain your promises heirs to the treasures of heaven.

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

Unlike the rich man of today's gospel, Dorothy Day – pacifist, social activist and co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement – responded to the homeless and hungry and poor with hospitality. Here are two tiny extracts from her writings.

"What we would like to do is change the world--make it a little simpler for people to feed, clothe, and shelter themselves as God intended them to do. And, by fighting for better conditions, by crying out unceasingly for the rights of the workers, the poor, of the destitute--the rights of the worthy and the unworthy poor, in other words--we can, to a certain extent, change the world; we can work for the oasis, the little cell of joy and peace in a harried world" (*The Catholic Worker*, June 1946).

"A custom existed among the first generations of Christians, when faith was a bright fire that warmed more than those who kept it burning. In every house then a room was kept ready for any stranger who might ask for shelter; it was even called 'the stranger's room.' Not because these people thought they could trace something of someone they loved in the stranger who used it, not because the man or woman to whom they gave shelter reminded them of Christ, but because—plain and simple and stupendous fact—he or she was Christ" (*Dorothy Day: Selections from Her Writings*. Springfield: Templegate, 1997).

A reading from the prophet Amos

The almighty Lord says this:

Woe to those ensconced so snugly in Zion
and to those who feel so safe on the mountain of Samaria.
Lying on ivory beds
and sprawling on their divans,
they dine on lambs from the flock,
and stall-fattened veal;
they bawl to the sound of the harp,
they invent new instruments of music like David,
they drink wine by the bowlful,
and use the finest oil for anointing themselves,
but about the ruin of Joseph they do not care at all.
That is why they will be the first to be exiled;
the sprawlers' revelry is over.

6:1, 4–7

First Reading

Today's reading from the prophet Amos is even more of a diatribe than last Sunday's. It's a fierce denunciation of the self-indulgent upper classes of society in both the northern kingdom of Israel and Samaria and the southern kingdom of Judah (though "Zion" may be a later addition given that Amos had been called from the south to prophesy in the north).

No doubt Amos' spartan life as a shepherd and arborist gave him a penetrating perspective on the hedonism of the rich and mighty. He certainly paints a vivid portrait of their sensuous extravagances. We are left under no illusions as to how mesmerised they were by their lives of leisure and luxury. They were blinded both to the needs of the poor and to the danger posed by rising powers. "The sprawlers' revelry" was indeed over soon after, when Assyrian forces overwhelmed the kingdom.

Amos' warning remains compelling for any nation or organisation whose power-brokers become complacent. While taking care not to overplay the drama, readers should proclaim this denunciation with the vigour of the prophet himself.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 145:6–10

R. Praise the Lord, my soul!
or
R. Alleluia!

It is the Lord who keeps faith for ever,
who is just to those who are oppressed.
It is he who gives bread to the hungry,
the Lord, who sets prisoners free. R.

It is the Lord who gives sight to the blind,
who raises up those who are bowed down.
It is the Lord who loves the just,
the Lord, who protects the stranger. R.

He upholds the widow and orphan
but thwarts the path of the wicked.
The Lord will reign for ever,
Zion's God, from age to age. R.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 145/146 is the first of a group of psalms that bring the whole book to a close on a sustained note of praise. The short response for today, taken from the beginning of the psalm, establishes this tone immediately. The psalmist proceeds to celebrate God's faithful goodness, listing the various kinds of vulnerable and needy people whom God comes to the help of.

Many of these affirmations have parallels in other psalms, so Psalm 145/146 can be seen as a resumé of some of the positive themes of the whole psalter. There may be no direct connection, but the catalogue of God's actions on behalf of the defenceless brings to mind Jesus' manifesto in the synagogue at Nazareth. Quoting Isaiah, Jesus announces that his mission is to the poor, the captives, the blind and the downtrodden (Lk 4:18).

More often than not, the responsorial psalm echoes or elaborates on the theme of the first reading. It does this today by way of complete contrast. God's active care for the poor is the opposite of the blind self-obsession that Amos condemns. Readers should enter easily into its spirit of glad acknowledgement.

A reading from the first letter of St Paul to Timothy 6:11-16

As a man dedicated to God, you must aim to be saintly and religious, filled with faith and love, patient and gentle. Fight the good fight of the faith and win for yourself the eternal life to which you were called when you made your profession and spoke up for the truth in front of many witnesses. Now, before God the source of all life and before Jesus Christ, who spoke up as a witness for the truth in front of Pontius Pilate, I put to you the duty of doing all that you have been told, with no faults or failures, until the Appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who at the due time will be revealed
by God, the blessed and only Ruler of all,
the King of kings and the Lord of lords,
who alone is immortal,
whose home is in inaccessible light,
whom no man has seen and no man is able to see:
to him be honour and everlasting power. Amen.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke 16:19-31

Jesus said to the Pharisees: 'There was a rich man who used to dress in purple and fine linen and feast magnificently every day. And at his gate there lay a poor man called Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to fill himself with the scraps that fell from the rich man's table. Dogs even came and licked his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to the bosom of Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried.'

'In his torment in Hades he looked up and saw Abraham a long way off with Lazarus in his bosom. So he cried out, "Father Abraham, pity me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in agony in these flames." "My son," Abraham replied "remember that during your life good things came your way, just as bad things came the way of Lazarus. Now he is being comforted here while you are in agony. But that is not all: between us and you a great gulf has been fixed, to stop anyone, if he wanted to, crossing from our side to yours, and to stop any crossing from your side to ours."

'The rich man replied, "Father, I beg you then to send Lazarus to my father's house, since I have five brothers, to give them warning so that they do not come to this place of torment too." "They have Moses and the prophets," said Abraham, "let them listen to them." "Ah, no, father Abraham," said the rich man "but if someone comes to them from the dead, they will repent." Then Abraham said to him, "If they will not listen either to Moses or to the prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone should rise from the dead."

Second Reading

In today's third and final reading from 1 Timothy, we are told that Timothy had already made a public profession of faith "in front of many witnesses." Later in the letter, in a passage we never hear on a Sunday, there's reference to the "spiritual gift" given him through "the laying on of hands by the elders" (4:14). That sounds like a rite of designating him for office. Now the author, whether Paul or a disciple, reminds Timothy of his duty to be a holy and virtuous person and to put all that he had learned about leadership into practice. It is as if he were standing in front of Timothy and asking him to take the oath of office. The example that is invoked for him to emulate is none other than that of Jesus when he testified before Pilate. From there the solemn address takes a liturgical turn and becomes a kind of creed culminating in a short doxology.

Readers have a challenge on their hands with this reading. It gets progressively more complex from one sentence to the next. The first presents no problem, the second is a little more elaborate, while the third (in the regular Lectionary) is one unbroken sentence constituting two-thirds of the entire passage. Not only that, but as has been noted above, its style changes half-way through from a summons to duty to a confession of faith.

This will take careful preparation. Readers need to have the assembly very much in mind. How can they guide them surely through this increasingly overladen text so that its core message is clear? They will have to moderate their pace and modulate their tone with skill. The final hymn-like section in particular ought not be hurried. It would certainly be useful to examine the NRSV text and layout.

Gospel

Luke wasted no time establishing the theme of reversal in his gospel. It's embedded in Mary's great canticle, the *Magnificat* (1:46-55). The proud, the powerful and the rich will be cast down and the lowly and the hungry raised up. The theme of reversal continues with the blessings and woes (6:20-26) and is maintained through to the end. Facing his last days, Jesus tells the parable of the vineyard tenants (20:9-19). The vineyard will be taken from them and given to others.

The story of Lazarus and the rich man displays the same dynamic. The reversal to come is heralded by the fact that it's the nobody, Lazarus, who is given a name, while the privileged one is nameless. There's more to come. Lazarus, the poor, diseased and hungry outsider is made at home in "the bosom of Abraham." The well-dressed, fine-feasting insider is relegated to the domain of the dead where he suffers pain and thirst. But the gulf between them is as unbridgeable as ever.

The parable is addressed to the Pharisees. They are the ones who prided themselves on being sons of Abraham and Moses. In the first place, therefore, Jesus is calling these self-satisfied insiders to account. But the added reference to one who might "rise from the dead" may reflect Luke's concern that successful Christians are prone to the same blindness and deafness as their Jewish counterparts. It's a perennial issue.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time II)

May the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.

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 II, Roman Missal p. 715)

