

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

14th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

5 July 2020



Collect

O God, who in the abasement of your Son
have raised up a fallen world,
fill your faithful with holy joy,
for on those you have rescued from slavery to sin
you bestow eternal gladness.
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

Today we approach the middle section of Matthew's gospel. We read one short passage from the two chapters (11 and 12) that lead from the Mission Sermon (10:1 – 11:1) to the Parable Sermon (13:1–53). Fundamental aspects of the mystery of the divine and human Jesus are revealed to us today. Jesus' ecstatic prayer offers us a precious insight into his loving communion with the Father. This heavenward gaze is complemented by the open arms of an earthly embrace: "Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened". In accordance with the vision of the prophet Zechariah, Jesus comes among us as a humble man of peace, not as a warrior king.

We are enabled to live like Jesus – in peaceful communion with God and with one another – because we possess the Spirit of God. As Paul taught the Romans, "the Spirit of God has made his home in you". We remain flesh-and-blood human beings but enlivened by the Spirit "who raised Jesus from the dead".

A reading from the prophet Zechariah 9:9–10

The Lord says this:

‘Rejoice heart and soul, daughter of Zion!
Shout with gladness, daughter of Jerusalem!
See now, your king comes to you;
he is victorious, he is triumphant,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
He will banish chariots from Ephraim
and horses from Jerusalem;
the bow of war will be banished.
He will proclaim peace for the nations.
His empire shall stretch from sea to sea,
from the River to the ends of the earth.’

First Reading

The mission of the prophet Zechariah took place in Jerusalem around the year 520 BC. He was called to preach to the Israelites who had returned to rebuild the city after their exile in Babylon. He offers them visions of a new and glorious future in which the whole cosmos will be at peace.

The oracle from which today’s reading is taken promises the arrival of a king. This will be no ordinary king accompanied by chariots and war-horses and squads of archers. This king will confound expectations by arriving not on a steed of war but on a humble donkey. Paradoxically this seemingly innocuous person will purge the world of weapons of war. He will rule over a vast empire of peace.

Readers and listeners alike will recognise this passage as the source of the text quoted by Matthew in his account of Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem (21:5).

The challenge for the reader is to manage the transition from the jubilant tone of the first few lines to the unexpected earthiness of what follows: “humble and riding on a donkey”. This is meant to serve as a kind of punch line that takes the congregation by surprise. The reading continues with a second reversal of expectations when this almost comic figure seated on a donkey is described as the bringer of world peace.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 144:1–2, 8–11, 13–14

R. I will praise your name for ever,
my king and my God.

or

R. Alleluia!

I will give you glory, O God my King,
I will bless your name for ever.

I will bless you day after day
and praise your name for ever. **R.**

The Lord is kind and full of compassion,
slow to anger, abounding in love.

How good is the Lord to all,
compassionate to all his creatures. **R.**

All your creatures shall thank you, O Lord,
and your friends shall repeat their blessing.
They shall speak of the glory of your reign
and declare your might, O God. **R.**

The Lord is faithful in all his words
and loving in all his deeds.

The Lord supports all who fall
and raises all who are bowed down. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 144/145 is entirely a hymn of praise, untroubled by doubt or struggle. It offers praise and thanks to God whose boundless power and goodness orders everything perfectly.

The response is adapted from the opening of the psalm. Because it runs into two lines, readers will need to finish the first line with a slight upward inflexion so that the brief pause there will not mislead the congregation into responding too soon.

The verses are all consistent in tone. From start to finish the spirit of the psalm is one of confident faith and grateful praise.

It is worth noting that the third verse echoes the confession of faith we heard from the book of Exodus on Trinity Sunday.

A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans
8:9, 11–13

Your interests are not in the unspiritual, but in the spiritual, since the Spirit of God has made his home in you. In fact, unless you possessed the Spirit of Christ you would not belong to him, and if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then he who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you.

So then, my brothers, there is no necessity for us to obey our unspiritual selves or to live unspiritual lives. If you do live in that way, you are doomed to die; but if by the Spirit you put an end to the misdeeds of the body you will live.

A reading from the holy Gospel
according to Matthew **11:25–30**

Jesus exclaimed, 'I bless you, Father, Lord of heaven and of earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the clever and revealing them to mere children. Yes, Father, for that is what it pleased you to do. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.

'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest. Shoulder my yoke and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. Yes, my yoke is easy and my burden light.'

Second Reading

This is the first of five readings from the eighth chapter of Romans that we hear over successive Sundays. Today we begin with verse nine, but omit verse ten, presumably because the compilers of the lectionary saw this as an aside that interrupted the flow of Paul's thought. Interestingly enough we never hear the first seven verses of this chapter on a Sunday or major feast day. Today's text overlaps with much of the second reading for the Fifth Sunday of Lent, as do the comments that follow.

In this short excerpt Paul plays with a series of contrasts. On one side he puts the unspiritual (which the NRSV translates more concretely as "flesh") along with death and sin ("misdeeds"); on the other he puts the Spirit of God (or of Christ), life and resurrection. Untangling these threads and discerning Paul's precise chain of thought isn't easy, even if we can get the general gist of his argument. It is worth the reader's effort to study the text and write out the essence of Paul's teaching here. One way of putting it goes like this: Jesus who died has been raised by the Spirit; the Spirit that raised Jesus now dwells in our mortal bodies and gives them life; in this Spirit we are freed from the necessity of sin and will live; without it we suffer the death of the unspiritual.

It is important to understand that when Paul contrasts the spiritual and the unspiritual (or, as in the NRSV, "flesh" and "Spirit") he is not basing himself on philosophical distinctions between body and soul. For Paul, we human beings always live "in the flesh"; the question is whether in our bodies we are governed by sin or by the Spirit. If the reader is clear about the thread of Paul's argument, then there is a better chance that the congregation will grasp the point, even if they may not be able to follow Paul's rather circular logic. The reading conveys good news. It should be proclaimed in that spirit, with clarity and deliberation. It can't be said often enough – the congregation gets only one chance to hear it.

Gospel

Each part of the gospel reading has connections with other texts in the scriptures. The beginning of Jesus' outburst of prayer to the Father echoes the spirit, if not the exact words, of the beatitudes (Matthew 5:1–12). The "mere children" to whom things are revealed make us mindful of the "poor in spirit" whom Jesus declared blessed, "for theirs is the kingdom of heaven". The latter part of the prayer offers teaching about Jesus' relationship with his Father. It has much in common with numerous passages in John's gospel where Jesus speaks of his intimate communion with the Father. To take but one example: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father", was Jesus' reply to Philip at the last supper (John 14:9).

The invitation that follows the prayer – "Come to me . . . my burden light" – is anticipated by several similar texts in Jewish wisdom literature. Wisdom appears there as a person (usually female) offering hospitality and solace as does Jesus: "Come to me, you who desire me, and eat your fill of my fruits" (Sirach 24:19). Each of these three elements – the prayer address, the teaching, and the invitation – should be proclaimed according to its proper character.

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.)