

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Easter Sunday

Year B

4 April 2021



Collect

O God, who on this day,
through your Only Begotten Son,
have conquered death
and unlocked for us the path to eternity,
grant, we pray, that we who keep
the solemnity of the Lord's Resurrection
may, through the renewal brought by your Spirit,
rise up in the light of life.
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

The tide of joy released by the Easter Vigil flows over into Easter Day. During the night the church glowed with light from within. Now light floods the world. The flame of the Easter Candle is matched by the fire of the sun that brings light and warmth and life to all. Christ is risen indeed!

So wonderful is this mystery that it can't be taken in all at once, even with a liturgy as rich in word and symbol as the Easter Vigil. We need time to marvel at what it all means. Easter Day is the springboard for our revelling in the mystery. The Mass of Easter Sunday glances back to the vigil service and looks ahead to the Easter season. For fifty days the Church keeps company with the Risen Lord. Day by day we will enjoy the peace of his presence and will delight in the Spirit he has breathed upon us.

With the newly baptised we will explore the unlimited possibilities that life in Christ offers us. Augustine understood: Easter was no time for kneeling; it was for standing upright and singing "Alleluia!"

The readings for Easter Sunday are the same throughout the three-year cycle.

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

10:34, 37–43

Peter addressed Cornelius and his household: 'You must have heard about the recent happenings in Judaea; about Jesus of Nazareth and how he began in Galilee, after John had been preaching baptism. God had anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power, and because God was with him, Jesus went about doing good and curing all who had fallen into the power of the devil. Now I, and those with me, can witness to everything he did throughout the countryside of Judaea and in Jerusalem itself: and also to the fact that they killed him by hanging him on a tree, yet three days afterwards God raised him to life and allowed him to be seen, not by the whole people but only by certain witnesses God had chosen beforehand. Now we are those witnesses – we have eaten and drunk with him after his resurrection from the dead – and he has ordered us to proclaim this to his people and to tell them that God has appointed him to judge everyone, alive or dead. It is to him that all the prophets bear this witness: that all who believe in Jesus will have their sins forgiven through his name.'

Responsorial Psalm Ps 117:1–2, 16–17, 22–23

R. This is the day the Lord has made;
let us rejoice and be glad.

or

R. Alleluia.

Give thanks to the Lord for he is good,
for his love has no end.

Let the sons of Israel say:

'His love has no end.' **R.**

The Lord's right hand has triumphed;
his right hand raised me up.

I shall not die, I shall live
and recount his deeds. **R.**

The stone which the builders rejected
has become the corner stone.

This is the work of the Lord,
a marvel in our eyes. **R.**

First Reading

Throughout the Easter season the first reading is not from the Hebrew scriptures but from the Acts of the Apostles. This companion volume to Luke's gospel – unique in the New Testament – recounts the work of the Holy Spirit in firing the spread of the gospel and the growth of the early Church.

Today we are plunged into the story mid-stream. We find the apostle Peter testifying to a Roman centurion and his household about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. To grasp the full import of what Peter is saying we need to locate this passage in the Acts and read what precedes and follows it. The whole of chapter 10 is devoted to a critical issue for the early Church: is the good news for non-Jews (Gentiles) as well as for Jews?

The answer is a resounding "Yes"! It is communicated to Peter by means of a vision of creatures deemed unclean by Jewish dietary law. He is commanded to kill and eat of the unclean creatures. He comes to understand this as a revelation that the gospel was to be preached to the Gentiles. They too were to be baptised and welcomed as equal members of the Christian community.

Unfortunately the verse (10:34) that conveys Peter's discovery and forms the bridge to his preaching has been omitted in the lectionary. What we have therefore is simply a summary – though an impressive one – of the good news vouched for by first-hand witnesses like Peter.

This is decisive testimony. It should be delivered with the same conviction and confidence as when Peter first spoke out.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 117/118 is a song of thanksgiving from a person who had been delivered from distress. It is offered in the context of a public religious festival and blends the personal with the communal.

The verses are selected from different parts of the psalm. The response is the text that follows on from the third verse.

This psalm was felt by the early Christian community to foreshadow the experience of Jesus who was rejected but raised up. It was widely used to interpret his death and resurrection. The statement, "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone", is cited in several writings of the New Testament.

The spirit with which it should be proclaimed is one of exultant joy.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Colossians**

3:1–4

Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ, you must look for the things that are in heaven, where Christ is, sitting at God's right hand. Let your thoughts be on heavenly things, not on the things that are on the earth, because you have died, and now the life you have is hidden with Christ in God. But when Christ is revealed – and he is your life – you too will be revealed in all your glory with him.

Alternative Second Reading

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians**

5:6–8

You must know how even a small amount of yeast is enough to leaven all the dough, so get rid of all the old yeast, and make yourselves into a completely new batch of bread, unleavened as you are meant to be. Christ, our passover, has been sacrificed; let us celebrate the feast, by getting rid of all the old yeast of evil and wickedness, having only the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

**A reading from the holy Gospel
according to John**

20:1–9

It was very early on the first day of the week and still dark, when Mary of Magdala came to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been moved away from the tomb and came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved. 'They have taken the Lord out of the tomb' she said 'and we don't know where they have put him.'

So Peter set out with the other disciple to go to the tomb. They ran together, but the other disciple, running faster than Peter, reached the tomb first; he bent down and saw the linen cloths lying on the ground, but did not go in. Simon Peter who was following now came up, went right into the tomb, saw the linen cloths on the ground, and also the cloth that had been over his head; this was not with the linen cloths but rolled up in a place by itself. Then the other disciple who had reached the tomb first also went in; he saw and he believed. Till this moment they had failed to understand the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead.

Second Reading

There are two options for the second reading, both short. The first is an excerpt from the letter to the Colossians. No final agreement has been reached among scholars as to whether Colossians was written by Paul himself or by a later disciple, nor about where and when it was composed.

Colossians 2:12 – “You have been buried with Christ, when you were baptised; and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead” – certainly sounds authentically Pauline and has a direct link with today's feast. It sums up what we heard from the letter to the Romans during last night's Vigil. It also leads to today's reading from chapter 3 which begins with an implicit reference to baptism: “Since you have been brought back to true life with Christ . . .”.

The author goes on to make a strong contrast between “heavenly things” and “the things that are on the earth”. This may seem to mean that we should live like angels, as if we were out of this world. However the rest of the letter makes it clear that the contrast is not between a disembodied life and life in the flesh, but between earthly life guided by the spirit and earthly life governed by sin.

The reader has no opportunity to explain this, only to proclaim the text in a spirit of thankfulness that we “have been brought back to true life in Christ” and we “will be revealed in all our glory with him”.

Gospel

On Good Friday afternoon John's gospel left us at the tomb of Jesus. Today it takes us back there. With Mary of Magdala, Peter and the disciple Jesus loved, we discover “very early on the first day of the week” that the tomb is empty. What are we to make of this?

There's a striking difference in the gospels between the passion narratives and the resurrection stories. The accounts of the passion are long, with a strong storyline, and are full of vivid detail. The resurrection stories, by contrast, are relatively short and enigmatic. They have an air of mystery and obscurity about them. They raise more questions than provide answers.

Today's passage is no exception. Who is the disciple Jesus loved? Why is so much made of who got to the tomb or went in first? What are we meant to understand about the various cloths? What exactly enabled the “other disciple” to see and believe? At this point no answers are given. We are left to wonder whether we ourselves have understood “the teaching of scripture, that he must rise from the dead”.

It may be just as well that the reading finishes where it does because the next verse goes on to say, “Then the disciples returned to their homes”. This statement only provokes more questions. Answers begin to emerge with the episode that follows – Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene. It's a great shame that the story of this beautiful and touching encounter is never heard on a Sunday.

Blessing for Easter Sunday

May almighty God bless us through today's Easter Solemnity
and, in his compassion,
defend us from every assault of sin.

Amen.

And may he, who restores us to eternal life
in the Resurrection of his Only Begotten,
endow us with the prize of immortality.

Amen.

Now that the days of the Lord's Passion have drawn to a close,
may we who celebrate the gladness of the Paschal Feast
come with Christ's help, and exulting in spirit,
to those feasts that are celebrated in eternal joy.

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 the Easter Vigil, Roman Missal p 422)