

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

6th Sunday of Easter

Year B

9 May 2021



Collect

Grant, almighty God,
that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion these days of joy,
which we keep in honour of the risen Lord,
and that what we relive in remembrance
we may always hold to in what we do.
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

For the past five weeks we, the long baptised and the newly baptised, have been relishing life in the Spirit, though we have yet to read Luke's account of the first outpouring of the Spirit. That will come in two weeks' time, on Pentecost Sunday. Today we anticipate the story of that original event by hearing of a later "Pentecost" – but one with a difference. This time the gift of the Spirit is poured out on pagans, and a new era in the mission of the Church is launched.

All the baptised share in this mission, as Pope Francis wrote in *The Joy of the Gospel*: "In virtue of their baptism, all the members of the People of God have become missionary disciples (cf. Mt 28:19). All the baptised, whatever their position in the Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelisation . . ." (#120). This is what we hear in the word of God today. Just as the Father sent "his only Son so that we could have life through him" (1 Jn 4:9), so Jesus sends his disciples: "I commissioned you to go out and bear fruit" (Jn 15:16).

Pope Francis' appeal continues to ring in our ears: "Let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of missionary enthusiasm!" (#80).

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles
10:25–26, 34–35, 44–48

As Peter reached the house Cornelius went out to meet him, knelt at his feet and prostrated himself. But Peter helped him up. 'Stand up', he said 'I am only a man after all!'

Then Peter addressed them: 'The truth I have now come to realise' he said 'is that God does not have favourites, but that anybody of any nationality who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to him.'

While Peter was still speaking the Holy Spirit came down on all the listeners. Jewish believers who had accompanied Peter were all astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit should be poured out on the pagans too, since they could hear them speaking strange languages and proclaiming the greatness of God. Peter himself then said, 'Could anyone refuse the water of baptism to these people, now they have received the Holy Spirit just as much as we have?' He then gave orders for them to be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ. Afterwards they begged him to stay on for some days.

First Reading

For the first reading today we return to the same chapter in Acts from which we read from on Easter Sunday. Once again we pick up the story part of the way through, then leap-frog our way through to the conclusion. Readers would be well advised to turn to their bibles and read Chapter 10 in full to make proper sense of the fragmented text they are to proclaim.

The whole chapter is devoted to a critical issue for the early Church: is the good news for 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 but which he is commanded to kill and eat. He recognises 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. Luke presents the conversion of Cornelius as a momentous breakthrough in the life and mission of the early Church.

The reading falls into three clear parts. First, Peter arrives at the house of the Gentile, Cornelius, and engages with him; next he speaks to the gathering about what has been revealed to him; and finally a Pentecost-like event is reported in which the Holy Spirit descends, strange languages are spoken, and the hearers are baptised – the difference being that this time they are Gentiles, not Jews.

Readers who understand that this episode records the historic transition to the Gentile mission will proclaim the text with clarity, strength and joy.

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 97:1–4

R. The Lord has revealed to the nations his saving power.

or

R. Alleluia.

Sing a new song to the Lord
for he has worked wonders.
His right hand and his holy arm
have brought salvation. **R.**

The Lord has made known his salvation;
has shown his justice to the nations.
He has remembered his truth and love
for the house of Israel. **R.**

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.
Shout to the Lord all the earth,
ring out your joy. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 97/98 is a hymn of praise to God as a victorious warrior-king. The response, adapted from a verse of the psalm, connects directly with the first reading. The verses go on to declare that the wonders God has worked for his people Israel have demonstrated his saving power to all peoples. The conviction that Israel has been chosen by God for the salvation of the whole world appears repeatedly in the Old Testament.

The spirit of the psalm is self-evidently one of exultant praise. In their delivery readers will need to take care not to rush through the short lines. It will be better to respect the form in which the verses have been laid out.

A reading from the first letter of St John 4:7–10

My dear people,
let us love one another
since love comes from God
and everyone who loves is begotten by God and
knows God.
Anyone who fails to love can never have known God,
because God is love.
God's love for us was revealed
when God sent into the world his only Son
so that we could have life through him;
this is the love I mean:
not our love for God,
but God's love for us when he sent his Son
to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away.

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

15:9–17

Jesus said to his disciples:
'As the Father has loved me,
so I have loved you.
Remain in my love.
If you keep my commandments
you will remain in my love,
just as I have kept my Father's commandments
and remain in his love.
I have told you this
so that my own joy may be in you
and your joy be complete.
This is my commandment:
love one another,
as I have loved you.
A man can have no greater love
than to lay down his life for his friends.
You are my friends,
if you do what I command you.
I shall not call you servants any more,
because a servant does not know
his master's business;
I call you friends,
because I have made known to you
everything I have learnt from my Father.
You did not choose me,
no, I chose you;
and I commissioned you
to go out and to bear fruit,
fruit that will last;
and then the Father will give you
anything you ask in my name.
What I command you
is to love one another.'

Second Reading

Since next Sunday is observed in Australia as the Solemnity of the Ascension, and the feast has its own proper set of readings, today's extract from 1 John is the last for the Easter season. In spite of its brevity it conveys an all-important truth: that God has loved us first. God is the origin of love and the inspiration of all the love we have to offer.

The final lines of the reading, declaring that God "sent his Son to be the sacrifice that takes our sins away", are echoed in the third Eucharistic Prayer. It speaks of "the sacrificial Victim by whose death you willed to reconcile us to yourself".

The opening address, "My dear people", sets a warm and affectionate tone for the whole passage. It is a profoundly positive text, affirming that life and love are given to us by God in his Son. It should be a joy for readers to proclaim.

Gospel

Today's gospel passage flows directly from the one we heard last Sunday. We continue to have the sense of eavesdropping on an intimate conversation as Jesus speaks with his disciples. It's worth recalling the setting in which Jesus opens his heart to them. Night has fallen. The disciples have been profoundly moved by Jesus' extraordinary gesture of washing their feet. They are troubled by his talk of treachery and desertion. The atmosphere is intense.

Several sayings from this text have lodged in our collective memory: "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you"; "Love one another as I have loved you"; "A man can have no greater love than to lay down his life for his friends"; "I shall not call you servants any more . . . I call you friends". The challenge for the minister of the gospel is to proclaim these familiar phrases with a freshness that evokes their profound meaning.

This may apply especially to the combination of the words "love" and "commandment"; perhaps believers have grown so used to hearing them that they no longer puzzle as to how love can be commanded. Yet the question remains. Also puzzling is the omission of any reference to love of others beyond the community, nor to love of enemies.

The reading as a whole may be imagined as a necklace with a string of precious stones, with each gem deserving to be inspected and admired. It calls for a proclamation that is measured and meditative.

Blessing for Easter

May God, who by the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son
was pleased to confer on us
the gift of redemption and of adoption,
give us gladness by his blessing.

Amen.

May he, by whose redeeming work
we have received the gift of everlasting freedom,
make us heirs to an eternal inheritance.

Amen.

And may we, who have already risen with Christ
in Baptism through faith,
by living in a right manner on this earth,
be united with him in the homeland of heaven.

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 Easter Time, Roman Missal p 712.)