

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

20 June 2021



Collect

Grant, O Lord,
that we may always revere and love your holy name,
for you never deprive of your guidance
those you set firm on the foundation of your love.
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

As the days grow shorter and colder, with months of winter still ahead, we can find ourselves struggling with challenges that seem daunting. We can lose heart and feel threatened by what we have to face, either as individuals and families or as a parish community. It may all seem overwhelming. If we've come to Sunday Mass looking for encouragement today, we could be in for a bit of a shock.

When Jesus' disciples panic at the wind and waves that are buffeting their boat, he rebukes them, just as he has rebuked the storm. "Why are you so frightened?" he says to them, "How is it that you have no faith?" It's a tough challenge. But one that's not unfair. Jesus has just calmed the elements. What he wants the disciples to do is to see – to see his divine power overcoming all the forces of chaos – and so to let go of their fear and put their faith in him.

If we dare to do so, Paul declares, we shall become a new creation in Christ. Everything is made wholly new in him. Now that's good news!

A reading from the book of Job 38:1, 8-11

From the heart of the tempest the Lord gave Job his answer.

He said:

Who pent up the sea behind closed doors
when it leapt tumultuous out of the womb,
when I wrapped it in a robe of mist
and made black clouds its swaddling bands;
when I marked the bounds it was not to cross
and made it fast with a bolted gate?
Come thus far, I said, and no farther;
here your proud waves shall break.

First Reading

This is the second of the only two brief extracts that we have from the book of Job in the whole of the three-year cycle. Both are heard in Year B of Ordinary Time, but neither of them does justice to the majesty and beauty of this remarkable work. It's a great pity that the architects of the lectionary were unable to offer Sunday Mass-goers more readings from this book. Job's titanic struggle is always of interest to us, because the question of innocent suffering never ceases to haunt the human heart.

What we have here is a fragment of one of God's replies to Job's complaining. The whole reply goes on for two full chapters (38-39); it is a splendidly poetic presentation of the wonder of creation, and therefore of the power and majesty of the Creator. It is well worth reading in full.

Today's passage, depicting the tumultuous power of the sea, anticipates the gospel story, though this will only become clear later. Strangely, the image that is used to evoke the threat of engulfing waters is that of a baby. The sea is likened to a new-born child wrapped in swaddling clothes and confined to a pen. One might have thought that a caged lion would be a better image!

The reading is short but taut with energy. It is in the form of epic poetry. Readers should proclaim the text with heightened (but not exaggerated) drama. Their aim should be to enable the congregation to visualise the verbal images.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 106:23-26, 28-31

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.
or
R. Alleluia!

Some sailed to the sea in ships
to trade on the mighty waters.
These men have seen the Lord's deeds,
the wonders he does in the deep. **R.**

For he spoke; he summoned the gale,
tossing the waves of the sea
up to heaven and back into the deep;
their soul melted away in their distress. **R.**

Then they cried to the Lord in their need
and he rescued them from their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper:
all the waves of the sea were hushed. **R.**

They rejoiced because of the calm
and he led them to the haven they desired.
Let them thank the Lord for his love,
the wonders he does for men. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 106/107 is quite a long psalm. It outlines various situations of distress from which God has delivered those who cried out for help. In each case this calls for thanksgiving and praise.

The section that forms today's responsorial psalm has been chosen in view of the gospel story. The perils of the open sea are described; they give rise to terror and to prayer; in response the Lord stills the storm and thanks are offered. The opening lines of the psalm, summoning all to give thanks, provide the text of the response.

The four verses to be proclaimed form a single unit. They take us through the drama of a storm at sea, from the sailing to the thanksgiving. They paint a vivid word picture which calls for strong and energetic proclamation. This is a rather rare occasion when the content of the responsorial psalm explicitly anticipates the gospel reading.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Corinthians

5:14-17

The love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead; and the reason he died for all was so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them.

From now onwards, therefore, we do not judge anyone by the standards of the flesh. Even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now. And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here.

Second Reading

This short reading is taken from a chapter-long section in 2 Corinthians (5:11 – 6:10) in which Paul writes about his apostolic ministry in terms of reconciliation. It offers a thumbnail sketch of the good news. Christ has died out of love for all, so all are called to live for Christ; in Christ the old has gone, and everything has been made new. It contains some memorable phrases: “The love of Christ overwhelms us” (in the NRSV, “The love of Christ urges us on”) and “For anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation.”

This is not to say that Paul’s thought is clearly expressed or developed. It proceeds by way of contrasts: death vs life, the self vs Christ, flesh vs (spirit), the old vs the new. Even though the passage is only a few verses long, it still requires careful preparation. The more sure readers are of grasping the message that Paul wants to convey, the more likely it is that they will communicate it to their congregation. The clear climax of the reading is the last sentence in which Paul emphatically announces that all things have been made new.

Readers will note that as usual the NRSV employs inclusive language.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

4:35-41

With the coming of evening, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?' They were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

Gospel

Mark’s collection of parables is followed by a series of events in which Jesus demonstrates divine power. He calms a storm, exorcises a demoniac, raises a dead girl to life, and heals an afflicted woman.

The calming of the storm is an episode that draws deeply on themes found in the psalms, the prophets and wisdom literature: the human fear of unruly nature, especially stormy seas; sleep as a sign of trust in God; desperate prayer to God for deliverance; absolute divine power over nature; awe at the exercise of divine might. The Jesus of Mark’s gospel is a figure of divine authority firmly situated in an ancient tradition.

Of all the evangelists Mark presents the sharpest contrast between the authority of Jesus, exercised over every form of demonic power, and the disciples’ refusal to believe. In the course of his gospel Mark records a litany of rebukes delivered by Jesus to his disciples because of their unbelief. No flattery here or spin-doctoring here! The story is short, vivid and dramatic. It invites strong proclamation.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time V)

May almighty God always keep every adversity far from us
and in his kindness pour out upon us the gifts of his blessing.
Amen.

May God keep our hearts attentive to his words,
that they may be filled with everlasting gladness.
Amen.

And so, may we always understand what is good and right,
and be found ever hastening along
in the path of God's commands,
made coheirs with the citizens 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 Ordinary Time V, Roman Missal p. 716)