

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

8 November 2020



Collect

Almighty and merciful God,
graciously keep from us all adversity,
so that, unhindered in mind and body alike,
we may pursue in freedom of heart
the things that are yours.
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

One of the sayings that recurs time and again in the scriptures is “Do not be afraid”. Jesus repeatedly tells his disciples, “Fear not”. What might seem to cut across this constant reassurance is his insistence that his followers need to be alert, awake and ready for “the coming of the Son of Man”. This coming, he warns, may be sudden and unexpected.

These two approaches are not contradictory but complementary. There is no doubt that Jesus would have us free from fear, anxiety and worry. But this is no excuse for apathy, complacency or sloth. Jesus wants his followers to be alive and active, attentive and responsive to the call of life. No one was freer to choose life than Jesus himself.

This is his challenge and his gift to us – to enter into his own supreme freedom of mind and heart. The more this becomes our daily habit, the readier we will be to say our “yes” to life, and even to death when it comes.

A reading from the book of Wisdom**6:12–16**

Wisdom is bright, and does not grow dim.
 By those who love her she is readily seen,
 and found by those who look for her.
 Quick to anticipate those who desire her,
 she makes herself known to them.
 Watch for her early and you will have no trouble;
 you will find her sitting at your gates.
 Even to think about her is understanding fully grown;
 be on the alert for her and anxiety will quickly leave you.
 She herself walks about
 looking for those who are worthy of her
 and graciously shows herself to them as they go,
 in every thought of theirs coming to meet them.

First Reading

The book of Wisdom is recognised by Catholic and Orthodox churches, but not in Jewish or Protestant traditions. Scholars suggest it is the work of a Jewish author well versed in Greek thought and culture, writing in the Egyptian city of Alexandria a century or two before Christ. His aim is to support his fellow Jews by presenting Jewish faith and practice favourably in comparison with the religious and philosophical teachings of the Greeks and Egyptians.

Today's reading comes from the concluding section of the first part of the book. Its opening chapters seek to persuade rulers to pursue wisdom and justice. They finish with a speech in praise of wisdom, personified in female terms. We hear the first half of this commendation.

In a pragmatic culture like ours which values actions and outcomes, talk of an elusive attribute like wisdom may seem remote and abstract. It is a challenge to enter into an ancient oriental mind-set that imagines wisdom to be a noble lady who seeks our company. Readers will need to take time with this text, proclaiming it with enough deliberation to allow the congregation to tune in to its unfamiliar mode of thought.

Responsorial Psalm**Ps 62:2– 8**

R. My soul is thirsting for you O Lord my God.
 O God, you are my God, for you I long;
 for you my soul is thirsting.
 My body pines for you
 like a dry, weary land without water. R.
 So I gaze on you in the sanctuary
 to see your strength and your glory.
 For your love is better than life,
 my lips will speak your praise. R.
 So I will bless you all my life,
 in your name I will lift up my hands.
 My soul shall be filled as with a banquet,
 my mouth shall praise you with joy. R.
 On my bed I remember you.
 On you I muse through the night
 for you have been my help;
 in the shadow of your wings I rejoice. R.

Responsorial Psalm

With its theme of heartfelt desire for God, Psalm 62/63 complements the first reading. It is the prayer of one who keeps vigil in the sanctuary in search of the divine presence. The part that we hear today is animated by a peaceful spirit of longing and trust.

The response – adapted from the opening lines of the psalm – is full of feeling. Thirst is a universal human experience. Our need for water is insistent, our survival depends on it. Thirst is thus an entirely apt metaphor for our yearning for God.

The verses take us into a realm of confidence, gratitude and praise. They assure us that our desire for God will be fully satisfied. This the spirit in which they should be proclaimed.

**A reading from the second letter of
St Paul to the Thessalonians**

4:13–18

We want you to be quite certain, brothers, about those who have died, to make sure that you do not grieve about them, like the other people who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again, and that it will be the same for those who have died in Jesus: God will bring them with him. [We can tell you this from the Lord's own teaching, that any of us who are left alive until the Lord's coming will not have any advantage over those who have died. At the trumpet of God, the voice of the archangel will call out the command and the Lord himself will come down from heaven; those who have died in Christ will be the first to rise, and then those of us who are still alive will be taken up in the clouds, together with them, to meet the Lord in the air. So we shall stay with the Lord for ever. With such thoughts as these you should comfort one another.]

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

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

25:1–13

Jesus told this parable to his disciples: 'The kingdom of heaven will be like this: Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were sensible: the foolish ones did take their lamps, but they brought no oil, whereas the sensible ones took flasks of oil as well as their lamps. The bridegroom was late, and they all grew drowsy and fell asleep. But at midnight there was a cry, "The bridegroom is here! Go out and meet him." At this, all those bridesmaids woke up and trimmed their lamps, and the foolish ones said to the sensible ones, "Give us some of your oil: our lamps are going out." But they replied, "There may not be enough for us and for you; you had better go to those who sell it and buy some for yourselves." They had gone off to buy it when the bridegroom arrived. Those who were ready went in with him to the wedding hall and the door was closed. The other bridesmaids arrived later. "Lord, Lord," they said, "open the door for us." But he replied, "I tell you solemnly, I do not know you." So stay awake, because you do not know either the day or the hour.'

Second Reading

In this fourth excerpt from 1 Thessalonians, Paul addresses the concerns of the community about those who have died. The lectionary offers a very short alternative version of the passage but what follows presumes the full text. It is one of the options suggested for use at Christian funerals.

The Thessalonians' concerns are prompted by their expectation, shared at this stage by Paul himself, that the risen Lord would return in glory in their own lifetime. Given this conviction, the death of fellow believers presented a pressing problem. What was their fate?

Paul is at pains to reassure the community. Whether believers are alive or dead at the time of the Lord's coming they will all be brought to life by God. This is the enduring theological truth that Paul affirms. However he couches his teaching in terms that would have been familiar with his contemporaries but may seem fanciful in our scientific age. The imagery he uses is drawn from Roman imperial ceremonial and Jewish apocalyptic speculation. This reminds us that the tradition of faith needs to be re-imagined in every age to offer each new generation fresh insight into the mystery.

As usual readers will need to disentangle the core message from the additional ideas that flow so readily from Paul's fertile mind. This is the service they offer the congregation – a proclamation that enables everyone to grasp the key thought of the reading in one hearing.

Gospel

In the last chapter of his gospel before the narrative of the passion, Matthew presents three parables. We hear each one in turn over these three last Sundays of the liturgical year, culminating in the parable of the sheep and the goats on the feast of Christ the King.

Today's story is the familiar one of the ten bridesmaids, five wise and five foolish. It's a good illustration of the danger of a contemporary inclination to psychologise or over-analyse the parables. Such an approach inevitably takes offence at what appears to be the smug and self-righteous behaviour of the five wise bridesmaids. How could they justify not sharing the oil they have prudently brought with them?

This misses the point. Generally it's not the detail of a parable that's important but the unexpected conclusion that confounds listeners' expectations. Here Jesus is clearly warning his followers to be constantly on the alert, ready for the moment of decision whenever it arises. This is precisely his own situation at this stage of the gospel. He is about to make the ultimate choice, to risk his life and mission for the sake of truth. The disciple must be as ready as the Master to do the same.

What is thought-provoking is that Jesus presents the choice in terms of a joyous and light-filled celebration – a wedding feast – not the threat of an unfair trial and execution.

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.)