

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Trinity Sunday
7 June 2020



Collect

God our Father, who by sending into the world
the Word of truth and the Spirit of sanctification
made known to the human race your wondrous mystery,
grant us, we pray, that in professing the true faith,
we may acknowledge the Trinity of eternal glory
and adore your Unity, powerful in majesty.
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

Now that Pentecost Sunday has brought the Easter festival to a close, we resume our journey through Ordinary Time. The first part of this season, occupying the period between Christmas and Lent, is always quite short. It lasts for somewhere between five and nine Sundays, depending on when Ash Wednesday occurs. This second and much longer part lasts roughly about six months, spanning the period between the seasons of Easter and Advent.

Not every Sunday during this stage is observed as Ordinary Time. To start with, the first two Sundays after Pentecost are always celebrated as the feasts of the Holy Trinity and of the Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi). Every year the readings for these two festivals replace those for the Sundays of Ordinary Time. This means that over the years we hear the readings for the Sixth to the Twelfth Sundays of Ordinary Time much less often than the rest.

In addition, in some years other feasts, such as Saints Peter and Paul, the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross and All Saints, can fall on a Sunday and take precedence on that day. Nonetheless, after Trinity and Corpus Christi, the vast majority of the Sundays in the second part of Ordinary Time are observed as such.

The mystery of the Trinity can be approached as a theological conundrum or as an adventure in faith. The word of God invites us to take the latter route. The readings for the day help us retrace some of the steps taken by our forebears in faith as they were led to discover Father, Son and Spirit communing in the one Godhead and enfolding the whole of creation in their love.

A reading from the book of Exodus 34:4–6, 8–9

With the two tablets of stone in his hands, Moses went up the mountain of Sinai in the early morning as the Lord had commanded him. And the Lord descended in the form of a cloud, and Moses stood with him there.

He called on the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion, slow to anger, rich in kindness and faithfulness.' And Moses bowed down to the ground at once and worshipped. 'If I have indeed won your favour, Lord,' he said 'let my Lord come with us, I beg. True, they are a headstrong people, but forgive us our faults and our sins, and adopt us as your heritage.'

Responsorial Psalm

Daniel 3:52–56

You are blest, Lord God of our fathers.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

Blest your glorious holy name.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

You are blest in the temple of your glory.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

You are blest on the throne of your kingdom.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

You are blest who gaze into the depths.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

You are blest in the firmament of the heaven.

R. Glory and praise for ever!

First Reading

The reading from the book of Exodus takes us back to an early but critical moment in the journey. We return to Mount Sinai where the Israelites have camped on their way through the desert. Locating today's text in the Bible will shed light on the episode. Moses had earlier been given the Ten Words (or Commandments) by God on two tablets of stone, but on coming down from the mountain he found the people idolising the golden calf. In anger he destroyed the two tablets of stone, mixed the dust with water and made the people drink (32:15–20). We are told in the first verse of chapter 34 (not part of the reading) that the two tablets Moses is to take with him are replacements for the ones he had demolished; God has promised to rewrite the Ten Words on them.

The story does not tell us whether this happened or not. Instead we read that God gave Moses a powerful revelation, expressed in the third person: "Lord, Lord, a God of tenderness and compassion . . .". This is a succinct profession of Israel's faith. Not surprisingly variations of it are found elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures – in the psalms and prophets, for example. This statement forms the very heart of the reading; readers must make this clear by a dignified and deliberate proclamation. The congregation should hear it loud and clear. The reading therefore falls into three parts – an introduction, the Lord's declaration, and Moses' response. The first and third parts lead up to and flow from the second. Their relative importance should be clear in the way the text is proclaimed. It is worth noting that one verse from the Bible text has been omitted from the lectionary version – Exodus 34:7 – presumably because it speaks uncomfortably of divine retribution pursuing the guilty down through the generations. The compilers of the lectionary could be defended for this censorship on the basis that they have followed the example of the biblical writers who did similar things in their variations of the text.

Responsorial Psalm

What serves as the responsorial psalm today is not from the Book of Psalms at all. It is from a song that is not even fully recognised as an authentic biblical text in some traditions, and so may be hard to track down. It may be published in an appendix that is inserted between verses 23 and 24 of chapter 3 of the book of the prophet Daniel. The verses that we have are from the chant of the three Jews (Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego) who are thrown into the fiery furnace by the Babylonian king, Nebuchadnezzar. On their lips it is a hymn of praise as well as a confession of faith uttered in defiance of the pagan ruler. The unusual format presents a challenge for the reader. Each "verse" consists of only a single line. Readers will need to give clear vocal and visual cues to the congregation so that everyone is prompted to respond with the acclamation after every line.

**A reading from the second letter of
St Paul to the Corinthians 13:11–13**

Brothers, we wish you happiness; try to grow perfect; help one another. Be united; live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you.

Greet one another with the holy kiss. All the saints send you greetings.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the holy Spirit be with you all.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to John
3:16–18**

Jesus said to Nicodemus,

‘God loved the world so much
that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not be
lost
but may have eternal life.
For God sent his Son into the world
not to condemn the world,
but so that through him the world might be saved.
No one who believes in him will be condemned;
but whoever refuses to believe is condemned
already,
because he has refused to believe
in the name of God’s only Son.’

Second Reading

This short passage serves as the conclusion to Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians. It is entirely peaceful and positive in tone, providing a calm ending to a letter that has been stormy in parts. Paul repeatedly finds himself having to address the problem of divisions and factions in his communities. He constantly appeals for unity, tolerance and peace. In this brief extract we can sense Paul’s deep affection for his people and the earnestness of his appeal to them. The whole reading is composed of quite short phrases, mostly in the imperative. These should not be hurried. The congregation should be given the time and opportunity to hear each one in turn. Readers need to convey the depth of feeling with which Paul is voicing his pleas. He wants the very best for them and the very best from them. In the NRSV the text is addressed to “Brothers and sisters”.

The congregation will recognise Paul’s final greeting as one of the options for the presider to use at the beginning of the eucharist. In fact the reader will need to take extra care with this sentence to avoid prompting the congregation to respond with “And with your spirit”. Perhaps a slowing down and a dropping of tone in the final phrase “be with you all” will make it clear that this is a reading, not a greeting.

It goes without saying that the reading has been chosen for today because of the Trinitarian form of the greeting. This does not imply that Paul meant this formula in the way that the Church came to understand it in later centuries.

Gospel

On a first reading the gospel text does not appear to be Trinitarian at all. Jesus’ words to Nicodemus may shed light on his identity as God’s Son, but nowhere in this brief passage is God identified as Father, nor is there any reference to the Spirit. Taken in isolation, these few verses simply suggest a special relationship between Jesus and God. And this is done indirectly – Jesus does not speak about himself in the first person.

Once again the context provides some assistance. Earlier in his conversation with Nicodemus Jesus spoke about the need to be born of water and Spirit to enter the kingdom of heaven. The gospel writer John may well be assuming his readers are familiar with a baptismal practice using a Trinitarian formula. He may also be taking it for granted that when readers got to the passage chosen for today they won’t have forgotten what was said in the earlier part of the dialogue.

In any case the reading reveals something of the union between God and Son. They are entirely one in their loving action in and for the world. The text contains some memorable assertions: “God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son . . . “ and “God sent his Son into the world not to condemn the world, but so that through him the world might be saved”. These are words to be treasured.

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.)