

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

11 July 2021



Collect

O God, who show the light of your truth
to those who go astray,
so that they may return to the right path,
give all who for the faith they profess
are accounted Christians
the grace to reject whatever is contrary to the name of Christ
and to strive after all that does it honour.
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 Mark presents the story, Jesus is breathtakingly daring. He takes the risk of sending his fledgling disciples, the very ones who seem incapable of understanding who he really is, on a mission of evangelisation. They are to take no resources with them. There are no back-up teams, no reference groups, no emergency services. All they have is one companion and a message.

For us, with all our learning, our information technology, our institutional systems and abundant material resources, this seems the height of folly. But the more we think about it, the more we realise the wisdom in Jesus' action. He's reminding us that the most critical resource we have is ourselves. Nothing evangelises like the witness of a joyful, loving, welcoming, infectious faith. And a whole world of other resources can never make up for such personal testimony if it is missing.

Do we need to rediscover what Paul calls "the richness of the grace which God has showered on us in all wisdom and insight"? Or even find it for the first time? Then we'll have a treasure to share!

A reading from the prophet Amos**7:12–15**

Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, said to Amos, 'Go away, seer; get back to the land of Judah; earn your bread there, do your prophesying there. We want no more prophesying in Bethel; this is the royal sanctuary, the national temple.' 'I was no prophet, neither did I belong to any of the brotherhoods of prophets.' Amos replied to Amaziah, 'I was a shepherd, and looked after sycamores: but it was the Lord who took me from herding the flock, and the Lord who said, "Go, prophesy to my people Israel."'

First Reading

These few verses from the book of the prophet Amos pick up the theme of last Sunday's first reading and gospel – that prophets who deliver an unwelcome message are sure to be rejected. In this case the one who encounters opposition is Amos, a herdsman and farm labourer from the south sent to prophesy in the northern kingdom.

He is an outsider in several ways. Not only is he an intruder from the south, but he's not a member of the professional class of prophets operating at the national religious shrine of Bethel. Worse still, his mission is to speak God's word of judgement against the royal and priestly establishment of the day, represented by the priest Amaziah and King Jeroboam. Judgement is pronounced on them because of the rampant social injustice of the ruling classes.

The voice of Amaziah is the smug and dismissive voice of the powerful and the privileged. That of Amos is the voice of one who is free to speak his mind because he has nothing to lose. The reading is short but dramatic. It pits the opposing forces against one another quite starkly. The reader has the opportunity to convey the different character of priest and prophet as revealed in this sharp exchange.

Responsorial Psalm**Ps 84:9–14**

R. Lord, show us your mercy and love,
and grant us your salvation.

I will hear what the Lord God has to say,
a voice that speaks of peace,
peace for his people.

His help is near for those who fear him
and his glory will dwell in our land. R.

Mercy and faithfulness have met;
justice and peace have embraced.

Faithfulness shall spring from the earth
and justice look down from heaven. R.

The Lord will make us prosper
and our earth shall yield its fruit.

Justice shall march before him
and peace shall follow his steps. R.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm stands in contrast to the first reading. Unlike Amaziah's contempt for Amos and his message, the response and verses express the people's acceptance of God's word, with all the blessings it implies: peace, mercy, justice and fruitfulness. The response establishes the tone of the prayer right from the beginning, and the verses continue in the same spirit of confident trust in God and openness to his gifts.

Psalm 84/85 may have originated as a prayer for deliverance from exile; the verses that are prayed today constitute its second half. Their content and character invite the reader to proclaim them in a spirit of sure faith. The short lines should not be hurried through, but allowed to communicate the assurance they express. Readers will note that in the lectionary the first verse consists of five lines rather than the more usual four.

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

1:3–14

Blessed be God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,
who has blessed us with all the spiritual blessings of
heaven in Christ.

Before the world was made, he chose us, chose us in
Christ,
to be holy and spotless, and to live through love in his
presence,
determined that we should become his adopted sons,
through Jesus Christ
for his own kind purposes,
to make us praise the glory of his grace,
his free gift to us in the Beloved
in whom, through his blood, we gain our freedom,
the forgiveness of our sins.
Such is the richness of the grace
which he has showered on us
in all wisdom and insight.
He has let us know the mystery of his purpose,
the hidden plan he so kindly made in Christ from the
beginning
to act upon when the times had run their course to the end:
that he would bring everything together under Christ, as
head,
everything in the heavens and everything on earth.

[And it is in him that we were claimed as God's own,
chosen from the beginning,
under the predetermined plan of the one who guides all
things
as he decides by his own will;
chosen to be,
for his greater glory,
the people who would put their hopes in Christ before he
came.
Now you too, in him,
have heard the message of the truth
and the good news of your salvation,
and have believed it:
and you have been stamped with the seal
of the Holy Spirit of the Promise,
the pledge of our inheritance which brings freedom for
those whom God has taken for his own,
to make his glory praised.]

[*Short Form: omit text in brackets.*]

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

6:7–13

Jesus summoned the Twelve and began to send them out
in pairs giving them authority over the unclean spirits. And
he instructed them to take nothing for the journey except
a staff - no bread, no haversack, no coppers for their
purses. They were to wear sandals, but, he added, 'Do
not take a spare tunic.' And he said to them, 'If you enter
a house anywhere, stay there until you leave the district.
And if any place does not welcome you and people
refuse to listen to you, as you walk away shake off the
dust from under your feet as a sign to them.' So they set
off to preach repentance; and they cast out many devils,
and anointed many sick people with oil and cured them.

Second Reading

Today we read the first of seven passages from the
letter to the Ephesians. While the title names this as a
letter of Paul, most scholars believe it was written later
by a disciple who used Paul's name to give the letter
authority. This was common and accepted practice in
ancient times. The letter itself yields few clues as to
where and when it was written and to whom it was
sent. What is clear is that it offers a full and unified
account of God's loving purposes for humankind, as
they have been made manifest for us in Christ.

The letter's breadth of vision is evident in the text for
today, especially in the longer of the two versions
presented in the lectionary. It's a pity that the first
verses of the letter, conveying Paul's personal
introduction and greeting, have been omitted, but it's
true that they would have made a lengthy reading
even longer.

The reading is in the form of a Jewish prayer of
blessing. It is a beautiful exposition of the mystery of
the divine love that began before time, came to
realisation in Jesus Christ, and will be fulfilled in
eternity. But it is also a difficult text to proclaim well.
Four of the six sentences are quite long and
complicated. It will take all the skill of the reader to
engage and inspire the congregation from start to
finish.

Careful preparation is crucial. Readers will need to
read and re-read the text to distinguish between the
core assertion in each sentence (the trunk of the tree)
and the additional material which explains or
develops the thought (the branches). Then they should
read the whole passage aloud several times. It is a
solemn confession of faith and praise that should be
delivered positively and with confident authority.

Gospel

Today's passage introduces a new section of Mark's
gospel that records the mission of Jesus and the twelve
in and beyond Galilee. It reads as though Jesus'
rejection by his townsfolk is the spur for going further
afield, just as persecution of the first Christians in
Jerusalem led in time to the spread of the gospel
elsewhere.

Jesus' command to the twelve to take nothing for the
journey suggests that they are not being sent far. The
mandate he gives them – to preach repentance, to
free from demonic possession, and to heal – points
both back and forward. It recapitulates the key
features of his own ministry up to this point and
anticipates the commission the risen Lord will give to
the eleven in the last verses of the gospel.

This is the only place in the gospels where reference is
made to the practice of anointing the sick; the other
key New Testament witness to this ministry is James
5:14.

The mission of the twelve, like that of Jesus, is to bring
about the healing of body, mind and spirit by means
of preaching, exorcising and anointing. Their capacity
to achieve this depends not on the paraphernalia they
take with them but on the power of Jesus' word.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time II)

May the peace of God,
which surpasses all understanding,
keep our hearts and minds
in the knowledge and love of God,
and of his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ.
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 II, Roman Missal p. 715)