

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Second Sunday of Lent

Year C

13 March 2022



Collect

O God, who have commanded us
to listen to your beloved Son,
be pleased, we pray,
to nourish us inwardly by your word,
that, with spiritual sight made pure,
we may rejoice to behold your glory.
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Readings and Commentaries

Neither the Apostles' Creed nor the Nicene Creed make reference to Jesus' public life and ministry. They pass over it in complete silence, content to leap directly from his birth to his passion, death and resurrection. Paul's letters too tell us nothing of Jesus' apostolic ministry. It's the paschal mystery and our participation in it that is his preoccupation.

Faithful to the creeds, for centuries the Rosary invited meditation on the mysteries of Jesus' birth, suffering and glorification, but not on his earthly activity. That is, until 2002, when Pope John Paul II decreed the addition of five Luminous Mysteries to bring key events in Jesus' public life into focus. Unsurprisingly the transfiguration was one of them.

It's a multi-faceted jewel that invites viewing from many different perspectives and never ceases to fascinate. Today we are privileged to join Peter, James and John and catch a glimpse of divine glory before we too must come down from the mountain and journey on our way.

A reading from the book of Genesis

15:5–12, 17–18

Taking Abram outside the Lord said, 'Look up to heaven and count the stars if you can. Such will be your descendants' he told him. Abram put his faith in the Lord, who counted this as making him justified.

'I am the Lord' he said to him 'who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans to make you heir to this land.' 'My Lord, the Lord' Abram replied 'how am I to know that I shall inherit it?' He said to him, 'Get me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon.' He brought him all these, cut them in half and put half on one side and half facing it on the other; but the birds he did not cut in half. Birds of prey came down on the carcasses but Abram drove them off.

Now as the sun was setting Abram fell into a deep sleep, and terror seized him. When the sun had set and darkness had fallen, there appeared a smoking furnace and a firebrand that went between the halves. That day the Lord made a Covenant with Abram in these terms:

'To your descendants I give this land,
from the wadi of Egypt to the Great River.'

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 26:1, 7–9, 13–14

R. The Lord is my light and my salvation.

The Lord is my light and my help;
whom shall I fear?

The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
before whom shall I shrink? **R.**

O Lord, hear my voice when I call;
have mercy and answer.

Of you my heart has spoken:
'Seek his face.' **R.**

It is your face, O Lord, that I seek;
hide not your face.

Dismiss not your servant in anger;
you have been my help. **R.**

I am sure I shall see the Lord's goodness
in the land of the living.

Hope in him, hold firm and take heart.
Hope in the Lord! **R.**

First Reading

Careful reading of today's text from Genesis reveals that Abram (not yet Abraham) receives not one but two promises from God. The first – that of countless descendants – is given when the night sky is ablaze with stars. Abram takes this promise on faith. The second – that of the land – is given by day and confirmed after sunset by a display of divine power.

The promise of descendants, made again to Abraham after the test of being asked to sacrifice his only son Isaac, is dealt with very briefly. The image of star-studded heavens will resonate most with those who have seen them away from city constraints and been awestruck by the cosmic array.

The greater part of the reading is devoted to the promise of the land, and more specifically to the covenant ritual that seals it. It's a fearful scene. Three animals – a heifer, a goat and a ram – are butchered and halved, and two birds killed. Scavenging birds circle, darkness falls, fire and smoke appear. But it's all to good purpose. The covenant is confirmed.

Readers have a strong story to tell. The voices of Abram and the Lord punctuate the narrative, there's energy in the action, and vivid imagery to complete the picture. Once they have checked the pronunciation of words like "Chaldeans" and "wadi," perhaps even "heifer," they should deliver this with lively spirit.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 26/27 appears to be an amalgam of two prayers. The first, from which the response and the first stanza of the responsorial psalm are drawn, is a prayer of trust in and desire for God. The second, from which the remaining verses come, is a plea for help in the face of enemy attacks. It concludes with a resounding vote of confidence in the Lord.

The psalm can be seen as an expression of Abram's faith in the God who is his light and help and stronghold. It can also serve as a springboard for the gospel story. Jesus goes up the mount of transfiguration to pray, to "seek God's face," and in so doing himself becomes light. Strengthened in spirit, he is able to "hold firm and take heart" for the journey that will take him to Jerusalem.

As it stands, the first and fourth verses are spirited declarations of trust in God, while the two intervening verses are heartfelt petitions of a faithful servant of God. The repetition of the wholly affirmative response – "The Lord is my light and my salvation" – ensures that the overall effect of the psalm is to confirm our faith in the goodness of God. Readers should endeavour to pray it through with confidence and sincerity.

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

3:17 – 4:1

[My brothers, be united in following my rule of life. Take as your models everybody who is already doing this and study them as you used to study us. I have told you often, and I repeat it today with tears, there are many who are behaving as the enemies of the cross of Christ. They are destined to be lost. They make foods into their god and they are proudest of something they ought to think shameful; the things they think important are earthly things.] For us, our homeland is in heaven, and from heaven comes the saviour we are waiting for, the Lord Jesus Christ, and he will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of his glorious body. He will do that by the same power with which he can subdue the whole universe.

So then, my brothers and dear friends, do not give way but remain faithful in the Lord. I miss you very much, dear friends;
you are my joy and my crown.

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

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

9:28–36

Jesus took with him Peter and John and James and went up the mountain to pray. As he prayed, the aspect of his face was changed and his clothing became brilliant as lightning. Suddenly there were two men there talking to him; they were Moses and Elijah appearing in glory, and they were speaking of his passing which he was to accomplish in Jerusalem. Peter and his companions were heavy with sleep, but they kept awake and saw his glory and the two men standing with him. As these were leaving him, Peter said to Jesus, 'Master, it is wonderful for us to be here; so let us make three tents, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.' – He did not know what he was saying. As he spoke, a cloud came and covered them with shadow; and when they went into the cloud the disciples were afraid. And a voice came from the cloud saying, 'This is my Son, the Chosen One. Listen to him'. And after the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. The disciples kept silence and, at that time, told no one what they had seen.

Second Reading

Philippi was a Roman colony in north-eastern Greece where veterans from the imperial armies might retire. It was also the first Christian community that Paul established in Europe and one that he had particular affection for. His letter to them was written from prison, perhaps in Ephesus, at an unknown date. One reason Paul wrote was to thank the community for its financial support.

The passage for today connects directly with the gospel. Paul tells the Philippians that in the fullness of time their bodies will be transfigured with the glory of Christ. That's the teaching at the heart of this reading whether in the shorter or the longer version. It's contained in a lengthy extended sentence that will need to be prepared carefully by readers and delivered as intelligibly as possible, given its central importance.

Otherwise each version has its challenges. The shorter one begins abruptly with the assertion, "our homeland is in heaven." With no lead-in to this, the assembly may struggle to connect with the key message that the rest of the sentence contains.

The longer one includes a somewhat obscure attack on troublemakers promoting circumcision, but still has a double advantage. It begins engagingly with Paul's appeal to the Philippians to "be united in following my rule of life." The ensuing diatribe is difficult to digest, but its conclusion – "the things they think are important are earthly things" – does help make sense of the otherwise sudden reference to heaven.

Gospel

The story of the transfiguration remains as mysterious as it is familiar. It's familiar because we hear it every second Sunday of Lent as well as on the feast day itself in August. It's mysterious because its profound meaning can never be exhausted. It invites us into the heart of the Triune God where Father and Son ceaselessly exchange a love that is beyond our imagining. At the same time it takes us into the heart of our humanity where our desire for glory must contend with the cross.

Contributing to the story's familiarity are the multiple associations it has with other episodes in both Old and New Testament. The very names Moses and Elijah conjure up a whole history of divine self-revelation and engagement with the people of Israel. The naming of Peter, James and John brings to mind their presence at both the raising of Jairus' daughter and the agony in the garden. The tents suggest the exodus and its remembrance in the feast of tabernacles. The voice from the cloud reminds us of Jesus' baptism and the servant songs of the prophet Isaiah. And the manifestation of Jesus' glory prompts thought of the resurrection and the Parousia.

Luke's telling of the story is distinguished by his characteristic emphasis on prayer. Jesus "went up the mountain to pray" and it was while he prayed that his appearance changed. Only prayer will give us the hope of comprehending the import of this extraordinary story.

Concluding Prayer

Prayer over the People (Second Sunday of Lent)

Bless your faithful, we pray, O Lord,
with a blessing that endures for ever,
and keep us faithful
to the Gospel of your Only Begotten Son,
so that we may always desire and at last attain
that glory whose beauty he showed in his own Body,
to the amazement of his Apostles.
Through Christ our Lord.
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 Prayer over the People for the Second Sunday of Lent,
Roman Missal p. 252)