

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Third Sunday of Lent

Year C

20 March 2022



### Collect

O God, author of every mercy and of all goodness,  
who in fasting, prayer and almsgiving  
have shown us a remedy for sin,  
look graciously on this confession of our lowliness,  
that we, who are bowed down by our conscience,  
may always be lifted up by your mercy.  
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

This is the moment in the season of Lent when the faith community is free to choose the readings from Year A for the next three Sundays if they are better suited for the elect on their way to Easter initiation. Commentaries on these readings may be found in other volumes of this publication.

The gospels for Year C have their own merit, although that for today may trigger mixed feelings. It juxtaposes Jesus' warning to the unrepentant with an image of divine patience. The selections for the following two Sundays – the parable of the father and two sons and the story of the woman accused of adultery – are both better-known and much loved.

This trio of readings expands on the brief word spoken when the ashes were imposed on Ash Wednesday: "Repent, and believe in the gospel." The two elements of this saying go hand in hand. Repentance has a positive goal, that of welcoming the good news. And the good news can only be welcomed if we repent of our self-absorption. Kept happily engaged with each other, repentance and faith promise to bear good fruit.

## A reading from the book of Exodus

3:1–8, 13–15

Moses was looking after the flock of Jethro, his father-in-law, priest of Midian. He led his flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in the shape of a flame of fire, coming from the middle of a bush. Moses looked; there was the bush blazing but it was not being burnt up. 'I must go and look at this strange sight,' Moses said 'and see why the bush is not burnt.' Now the Lord saw him go forward to look, and God called to him from the middle of the bush. 'Moses, Moses!' he said. 'Here I am,' he answered. 'Come no nearer,' he said. 'Take off your shoes, for the place on which you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father,' he said 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.'

At this Moses covered his face, afraid to look at God. And the Lord said, 'I have seen the miserable state of my people in Egypt. I have heard their appeal to be free of their slavedrivers. Yes, I am well aware of their sufferings. I mean to deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians and bring them up out of that land to a land rich and broad, a land where milk and honey flow.'

Then Moses said to God, 'I am to go, then, to the sons of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." But if they ask me what his name is, what am I to tell them?' And God said to Moses, 'I Am who I Am. This' he added 'is what you must say to the sons of Israel: "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is my name for all time; by this name I shall be invoked for all generations to come.'

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 102:1–4, 6–8, 11

**R.** The Lord is kind and merciful.

My soul, give thanks to the Lord,  
all my being, bless his holy name.

My soul give thanks to the Lord  
and never forget all his blessings. **R.**

It is he who forgives all your guilt,  
who heals every one of your ills,  
who redeems your life from the grave,  
who crowns you with love and compassion. **R.**

The Lord does deeds of justice,  
gives judgement for all who are oppressed.  
He made known his ways to Moses  
and his deeds to Israel's sons. **R.**

The Lord is compassion and love,  
slow to anger and rich in mercy.  
For as the heavens are high above the earth  
so strong is his love for those who fear him. **R.**

## First Reading

In his dispute with the Sadducees about resurrection from the dead, Jesus cites Moses' address to God as "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Lk 20:37). In the original story, it is God who self-identifies with this title. Moses isn't satisfied and asks again for God's name. The reply he gets has intrigued believers ever since, "I Am who I Am." This name is as mysterious as the other is concrete, like the fiery flame and the bush. The combined titles suggest a divine being beyond comprehension who is yet deeply engaged with the world.

The first half of the reading paints a vivid picture of Moses' encounter with God. Having fled his homeland after murdering an Egyptian bully, he's now a shepherd among foreigners. The story highlights his isolation – he is on "the far side of the wilderness" – and his vulnerability. But God calls him by name and draws him into dialogue.

The second half spells out what it means for God to be the "God of your fathers." It means hearing the cry of the oppressed Hebrews and determining to set them free. Moses is commissioned to achieve this divine purpose. It's a defining moment in the saving history of God's chosen people.

As it has been handed down, the story is a fine example of dramatic art. The interplay of action and speech should enable readers to capture and maintain the assembly's attention. They should clearly convey a sense of its importance in the biblical tradition.

## Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 102/103 is a hymn of praise and thanksgiving in honour of God's goodness. It begins on a personal note – "My soul, give thanks to the Lord" – and continues in that vein through the second verse. The remaining two verses expand the horizon to include the whole people.

The third verse makes a clear connection with the first reading – "He made his ways known to Moses and his deeds to Israel's sons." We have just been reminded of those ways and deeds. They are the ways of the God who listens to the cry of the people. They are the deeds of the God who acts to set them free. All this is summed up succinctly in the response, "The Lord is kind and merciful."

Given its sunny spirit, this psalm appears quite often in the Lectionary, although verses acknowledging the fragile hold human beings have on life are never utilised. Readers have the pleasure of leading the assembly in a prayer that confesses God's mercy, love, compassion and justice.

**A reading from the first letter of St Paul  
to the Corinthians 10:1–6, 10–12**

I want to remind you how our fathers were all guided by a cloud above them and how they all passed through the sea. They were all baptised into Moses in this cloud and in this sea; all ate the same spiritual food and all drank the same spiritual drink, since they all drank from the spiritual rock that followed them as they went, and that rock was Christ. In spite of this, most of them failed to please God and their corpses littered the desert.

These things all happened as warnings for us, not to have the wicked lusts for forbidden things that they had. You must never complain: some of them did, and they were killed by the Destroyer.

All this happened to them as a warning, and it was written down to be a lesson for us who are living at the end of the age. The man who thinks he is safe must be careful that he does not fall.

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Luke 13:1–9**

Some people arrived and told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with that of their sacrifices. At this he said to them, 'Do you suppose these Galileans who suffered like that were greater sinners than any other Galileans? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did. Or those eighteen on whom the tower at Siloam fell and killed them? Do you suppose that they were more guilty than all the other people living in Jerusalem? They were not, I tell you. No; but unless you repent you will all perish as they did.'

He told this parable: 'A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard and he came looking for fruit on it but found none.

He said to the man who looked after the vineyard, "Look here, for three years now I have been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and finding none. Cut it down: why should it be taking up the ground?" "Sir," the man replied "leave it one more year and give me time to dig round it and manure it: it may bear fruit next year; if not, then you can cut it down."

**Second Reading**

The Corinthian community was a lively one, blessed with many gifts. But it was also divided into factions and Paul has to remonstrate with them. One particularly contentious issue concerned the consumption of meat sacrificed to idols. Were Christians free to eat it or not? Today's reading follows Paul's lengthy consideration of this issue. He has come down on the side of freedom but follows this with a serious warning to the headstrong Corinthians.

He reminds them of the gifts that their ancestors enjoyed on their way through the desert. They were led through the sea, guided by a cloud, fed with manna and provided with water from the rock. In spite of all these signs of God's providential care they were led into idolatry and struck down. To suit his purpose, Paul retells the story in Christian terms with explicit mention of baptism and Christ and implicit reference to the eucharist. In brief the Corinthians are warned not to abuse the freedom they've been given, lest they be lost.

This passage has probably been chosen more for its mention of Moses and the exodus than for the threat it conveys, but coming mid-way through Lent it offers useful food for thought about the risk of complacency. There's no mistaking the seriousness of Paul's admonition and that's the tone readers should adopt in their delivery.

**Gospel**

No other gospel makes mention of the two calamities cited by Luke in today's gospel – a massacre of Galileans by Pilate and multiple deaths caused by a building collapse in Jerusalem. Nor is there any mention of them in other records of the time. But each event is quite plausible and together they serve Jesus' purpose. The gist of his argument is this. If tragedies like that overtake people who were no more sinful than others, then listeners who stubbornly refuse to repent put themselves at risk of final judgement. This part of the gospel echoes the warning that Paul gave to the Corinthians in the second reading.

The ominous thrust of Jesus' words is immediately counterbalanced by his parable on patience. He does not make the connection explicit, but his teaching clearly implies that God is as patient with the sinner as the vineyard owner is with his fruitless fig tree.

The overall intent of this gospel passage is to invite a serious examination of conscience. Jesus makes no specific allegations against the members of his audience. It is left to them to search their hearts, identify what stumbling blocks there are to welcoming the good news, and clear the way for true discipleship. It's a well-timed prompt at this stage of Lent.

## Concluding Prayer

### Prayer over the People (Third Sunday of Lent)

Direct, O Lord, we pray, the hearts of your faithful,  
and in your kindness grant your servants this grace:  
that, abiding in the love of you and their neighbour,  
they may fulfil the whole of your commands.

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 Third Sunday of Lent, Roman Missal p. 262)