

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

6th Sunday of Easter

Year C

22 May 2022



Collect

Grant, almighty God,
that we may celebrate with heartfelt devotion these days of joy,
which we keep in honour of the risen Lord,
and that what we relive in remembrance
we may always hold to in what we do.
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

Close by the Colosseum in Rome, the imposing Arch of Titus still commemorates the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. It was around that tumultuous time that the book of Revelation/Apocalypse began to be written. Had the Temple of Jerusalem's day already been reduced to ruins? No-one has a sure answer to that. But it's noteworthy that in the final vision of Revelation, that of the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city has no temple.

Why? Because, as we hear today, "the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple." There was no need for a special place of worship. To be a citizen of this holy city was to abide in the divine presence and offer a continual sacrifice of praise. The author of the first letter of Peter (the Easter text in Year A) has something similar to say. He writes of Jesus as "the living stone" and the baptised as "living stones making a spiritual house" (2:4-5).

These words invite us to cultivate a deeper consciousness of God's dwelling in us and us in God. That's what Jesus promises believers in today's gospel. He and the Father will make their home in them, the Holy Spirit will teach them everything, and they will be blessed with peace. They will truly know themselves to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God" (1 Pt 2:9).

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles
15:1–2, 22–29

Some men came down from Judaea and taught the brothers, ‘Unless you have yourselves circumcised in the tradition of Moses you cannot be saved.’ This led to disagreement, and after Paul and Barnabas had a long argument with these men it was arranged that Paul and Barnabas and others of the church should go up to Jerusalem and discuss the problem with the apostles and elders.

Then the apostles and elders decided to choose delegates to send to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; the whole church concurred with this. They chose Judas known as Barsabbas and Silas, both leading men in the brotherhood, and gave them this letter to take with them:

‘The apostles and elders, your brothers, send greetings to the brothers of pagan birth in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia. We hear that some of our members have disturbed you with their demands and have unsettled your minds. They acted without any authority from us, and so we have decided unanimously to elect delegates and to send them to you with Barnabas and Paul, men we highly respect who have dedicated their lives to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly we are sending you Judas and Silas, who will confirm by word of mouth what we have written in this letter. It has been decided by the Holy Spirit and by ourselves not to saddle you with any burden beyond these essentials: you are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from fornication. Avoid these, and you will do what is right. Farewell.’

Responsorial Psalm **Ps 66:2–3, 5–6, 8**

R. O God, let all the nations praise you!
or

R. Alleluia.

O God, be gracious and bless us
and let your face shed its light upon us.
So will your ways be known upon earth
and all nations learn your saving help. **R.**

Let the nations be glad and exult
for you rule the world with justice.
With fairness you rule the peoples,
you guide the nations on earth. **R.**

Let the peoples praise you, O God;
let all the peoples praise you.
May God still give us his blessing
till the ends of the earth revere him. **R.**

First Reading

Today’s reading from the Acts is problematic from a number of points of view. First of all, the early Christian community clearly has a problem, a serious one, to deal with. Should people of pagan birth who became Christian be subject to the prescriptions of the Mosaic Law? Secondly, it’s possible that Acts 15 is combining two meetings in one. The circumcision of converts is the issue that takes Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to consult with the apostles and elders, but it isn’t mentioned at all in the final communiqué.

Thirdly, it isn’t easy to sort out how the meeting that Paul describes in his fiery letter to the Galatians (2:1-14) relates to the one that’s reported in today’s reading. And fourthly, the Lectionary juxtaposes two parts of the story – the preliminary background to the meeting (15:1-2) and its outcome (15:22-29) – without any report of the intervening debate. Those who hear the reading as it stands are led to suppose that the issue was resolved smoothly and swiftly. Finally, they may be puzzled by the apparent compromises contained in the resulting letter. The critical recognition that pagan converts were not obliged to be circumcised or to be bound by the Mosaic Law is not clearly stated.

For all these difficulties, none of which readers can resolve, the reading proceeds as a good story should. It would be helpful if the reader paused for a moment between the first and second paragraphs to at least hint that there is a significant gap in the account. Readers who grasp the importance of this event will ensure they communicate this to the assembly.

Responsorial Psalm

The whole of Psalm 66/67 serves as the responsorial psalm, except, ironically, for the two lines that identify it as a song of thanksgiving for a bountiful harvest. The omission of this specific reference allows the psalm to acquire a timeless and universal character. The repeated response and the chorus-like mention of “the nations,” “the peoples” and the “earth” make its wide scope unmistakable.

This global perspective makes the psalm a fitting complement to the reading from Acts. Many other psalms as well as writings of the prophets bear witness to a universalism that anticipates the extension of the Christian mission to the Gentiles. The primary form of the psalm is one of petition, but this is blended smoothly with admiring acknowledgement of the justice of God’s overarching reign. Readers should be able to enter easily into the psalm’s upbeat spirit and lead the assembly in joyful blessing.

A reading from the book of the Apocalypse
21:10–14, 22–23

In the spirit, the angel took me to the top of an enormous high mountain and showed me Jerusalem, the holy city, coming down from God out of heaven. It had all the radiant glory of God and glittered like some precious jewel or crystal-clear diamond. The walls of it were of a great height, and had twelve gates; at each of the twelve gates there was an angel, and over the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; on the east there were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. The city walls stood on twelve foundation stones, each one of which bore the name of one of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

I saw that there was no temple in the city since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple, and the city did not need the sun or the moon for light, since it was lit by the radiant glory of God and the Lamb was a lighted torch for it.

A reading from the holy Gospel
according to John **14:23–29**

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘If anyone loves me he will keep my word,
and my Father will love him,
and we shall come to him
and make our home with him.
Those who do not love me do not keep my words.
And my word is not my own;
it is the word of the one who sent me.
I have said these things to you
while still with you;
but the Advocate, the Holy Spirit,
whom the Father will send in my name,
will teach you everything
and remind you of all I have said to you.
Peace I bequeath to you,
my own peace I give you,
a peace the world cannot give,
this is my gift to you.
Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid.
You heard me say:
I am going away, and shall return.
If you loved me you would have been glad to know
that I am going to the Father,
for the Father is greater than I.
I have told you this now, before it happens,
so that when it does happen you may believe.’

Second Reading

Those who are keen to deepen their understanding of this final reading from the book of Revelation/Apocalypse – a vision of the new and heavenly Jerusalem – might venture to read the last major section of the book of the prophet Ezekiel. In the course of eight chapters (40:1 – 48:35) Ezekiel details his dream of a new Temple at great length and with close attention to measurements and materials.

This heavenly holy city, we are told repeatedly, is built on the number twelve. It has twelve foundation stones, one for each of the apostles, and twelve gates, one for each of the tribes of Israel. Jesus’ choice of twelve apostles clearly signified his mission to forge a new community out of the twelve tribes of Israel. Now, just as all twelve tribes were once united in one kingdom centred on Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem will be home for the newly ingathered people of God.

The concluding section brings some of Jesus’ claims in John’s gospel to mind. In the vision, “there was no temple . . . since the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the temple,” as foreshadowed by Jesus when he cleansed the temple (2:19-21). Nor was there need for sun and moon because the city was lit by the glory of God and the Lamb, in accordance with Jesus’ declaration “I am the light of the world” (8:12).

Readers should find it a great joy to unveil this radiant vision for the assembly. They should proclaim the reading at a pace that allows everyone to contemplate its beauty and promise.

Gospel

Time and again in John’s gospel, someone asks Jesus a seemingly straightforward question only to find that Jesus’ reply heads off at a tangent into uncharted territory. Today’s reading, from Jesus’ farewell discourse, is a case in point. It is his response to Thaddaeus’ question, “Lord, what is all this about? Do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?” What follows is an entrée into the intimacy shared by Father, Son and disciple, illuminated by the Holy Spirit. It is a disclosure of love and truth in simple words that are full of encouragement.

Jesus promises a peace “the world cannot give.” It will dispel the disciples’ fearful anxiety at the prospect of his departure. He tells them where he is going – “to the Father” – and that this will be all for their good. He goes on to say that “The Father is greater than I.” How this relates to what Jesus had already told his disciples – “I and the Father are one” (10:30) – isn’t immediately clear.

Just beyond the end of this reading, Jesus says “Come now, let us go.” The fact that the discourse continues at length suggests that the evangelist has joined two accounts of the evening’s conversation together without editing out this stage direction.

In sum, these words of Jesus inspire heartfelt hope. Son and Father, he promises, will make their home in us, the Paraclete will teach us everything, and we will know peace. This is a reading to be proclaimed thoughtfully and prayerfully.

Blessing for Easter

May God, who by the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son
was pleased to confer on us
the gift of redemption and of adoption,
give us gladness by his blessing.

Amen.

May he, by whose redeeming work
we have received the gift of everlasting freedom,
make us heirs to an eternal inheritance.

Amen.

And may we, who have already risen with Christ
in Baptism through faith,
by living in a right manner on this earth,
be united with him in the homeland of heaven.

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 Easter Time, Roman Missal p 712.)