

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

24 July 2022



### Collect

O God, protector of those who hope in you,  
without whom nothing has firm foundation, nothing is holy,  
bestow in abundance your mercy upon us  
and grant that, with you as our ruler and guide,  
we may use the good things that pass  
in such a way as to hold fast even now  
to those that ever endure.

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

Those with a bent for historical sleuthing might enjoy tracing the history of the Lord's Prayer from its appearance in the gospels of Matthew and Luke down to its present-day versions in English. They'd need to check out an early Christian writing called the Teaching of the Twelve Apostles (the Didache), St Jerome's translation of the scriptures into Latin (the Vulgate) around 400 AD, and documents of the emerging Roman liturgy.

A millennium or so later, English translations started to appear in prayer manuals. In conjunction with the King James Version of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer adopted a translation that is substantially the same as that still prayed in Catholic liturgy and devotion. Attempts have been made, especially since Vatican II, to agree on a new rendition of the Lord's Prayer that is faithful to the scriptures, expressed in contemporary English, and acceptable to the major English-speaking Christian Churches. Sadly, the third of these criteria has been the stumbling block.

One of the difficulties has been the word "trespasses." Should it be "sins" or "debts"? Another has been the petition, "Lead us not into temptation." Should it be replaced by "Save us from the time of trial"? We pray repeatedly for God's kingdom to come but it hasn't yet taken the form of an Our Father we can recite together in English.

## A reading from the book of Genesis 18:20–32

The Lord said, 'How great an outcry there is against Sodom and Gomorrah! How grievous is their sin! I propose to go down and see whether or not they have done all that is alleged in the outcry against them that has come up to me. I am determined to know.'

The men left there and went to Sodom while Abraham remained standing before the Lord. Approaching him he said, 'Are you really going to destroy the just man with the sinner? Perhaps there are fifty just men in the town. Will you really overwhelm them, will you not spare the place for the fifty just men in it? Do not think of doing such a thing: to kill the just man with the sinner, treating just and sinner alike! Do not think of it! Will the judge of the whole earth not administer justice?' The Lord replied, 'If at Sodom I find fifty just men in the town, I will spare the whole place because of them.'

Abraham replied, 'I am bold indeed to speak like this to my Lord, I who am dust and ashes. But perhaps the fifty just men lack five: will you destroy the whole city for five?' 'No,' he replied, 'I will not destroy it if I find forty-five just men there.' Again Abraham said to him, 'Perhaps there will be only forty there.' 'I will not do it' he replied 'for the sake of the forty.'

Abraham said, 'I trust my Lord will not be angry, but give me leave to speak: perhaps there will only be thirty there.' 'I will not do it' he replied 'if I find thirty there.' He said, 'I am bold indeed to speak like this, but perhaps there will only be twenty there.' 'I will not destroy it' he replied 'for the sake of the twenty.' He said, 'I trust my Lord will not be angry if I speak once more: perhaps there will only be ten.' 'I will not destroy it' he replied 'for the sake of the ten.'

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 137:1–3, 6–8

R. Lord, on the day I called for help,  
you answered me.

I thank you, Lord, with all my heart,  
you have heard the words of my mouth.  
Before the angels I will bless you.

I will adore before your holy temple. R.

I thank you for your faithfulness and love  
which excel all we ever knew of you.

On the day I called, you answered;  
you increased the strength of my soul. R.

The Lord is high yet he looks on the lowly  
and the haughty he knows from afar.

Though I walk in the midst of affliction  
you give me life and frustrate my foes. R.

You stretch out your hand and save me,  
your hand will do all things for me.

Your love, O Lord, is eternal,  
discard not the work of your hands. R.

## First Reading

If the situation weren't so serious, one might be amused by this David and Goliath contest between Abraham and God. The story follows immediately after God's promise last week to make Abraham the father of a great nation. It begins with God consulting himself about what to do with Sodom and Gomorrah, then turning up in front of Abraham. We're not told how Abraham knows God's intentions, but he immediately lectures his Master on ethics, launches into a round of bargaining, and drives the numbers down step by step.

In the event the cities were destroyed, but Abraham emerges from this exchange with his reputation enhanced. Only a person of admirable justice could have mounted such a challenge to the Almighty and stood his ground until God conceded and vacated the field. We don't hear the aftermath today, when the author reports an attempted male gang rape that precipitates the cities' fate. Some of the prophets offered an alternative view of Sodom and Gomorrah's guilt. For Isaiah it was social injustice (1:10-17), for Ezekiel it was failure to care for the poor.

Readers need to engage the assembly in this high-stakes game of haggling. This means taking their time with each stage of the bartering process and not playing down all the repetition that is involved. This is a story that invites reflection on what it means to be just, on the consequences of moral failure, and on the role of bargaining in our own prayer. It should be delivered with lively energy.

## Responsorial Psalm

In many of the psalms, the boundaries between the individual and the people and between the private and the public are very fluid. That is the case with Psalm 137/138. Essentially it is a hymn of gratitude from a person who has been saved from an unidentified danger or difficulty, but there are hints of a broader scope.

The response, taken directly from the psalm itself, is a personal acknowledgement of the help rendered by God. This sense of intimacy characterises much of the psalm. But we are made aware of a wider audience. The psalmist prays "before the angels" and "before your holy temple," thus implying some kind of public worship. There's also a public quality about the declaration that God "looks on the lowly" but keeps "the haughty" at a distance.

The response could be understood as Abraham's appreciation of God's answer to his plea for Sodom, but the verses don't seem to match his confident challenge to God. Rather than try and force too close a connection with the first reading, perhaps it is best simply to take the psalm as expressing the sentiments of anyone who has turned to God in a desperate situation and found their prayer answered. Readers should pray this psalm with a sincerity that moves the assembly to put their trust in God's "faithfulness and love."

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

**2:12–14**

You have been buried with Christ, when you were baptised; and by baptism, too, you have been raised up with him through your belief in the power of God who raised him from the dead. You were dead, because you were sinners and had not been circumcised: he has brought you to life with him, he has forgiven us all our sins.

He has overridden the Law, and cancelled every record of the debt that we had to pay; he has done away with it by nailing it to the cross.

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

**11:1–13**

Once Jesus was in a certain place praying, and when he had finished, one of his disciples said, 'Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.' He said to them, 'Say this when you pray:

"Father, may your name be held holy,  
your kingdom come;  
give us each day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our sins,  
for we ourselves forgive each one who is in debt to us.  
And do not put us to the test."

He also said to them, 'Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him in the middle of the night to say, "My friend, lend me three loaves because a friend of mine on his travels has just arrived at my house and I have nothing to offer him"; and the man answers from inside the house, "Do not bother me. The door is bolted now, and my children and I are in bed; I cannot get up to give it to you." I tell you, if the man does not get up and give it to him for friendship's sake, persistence will be enough to make him get up and give his friend all he wants.

'So I say to you: Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. For the one who asks always receives; the one who searches always finds; the one who knocks will always have the door opened to him. What father among you would hand his son a stone when he asked for bread? Or hand him a snake instead of a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asked for an egg? If you then, who are evil, know how to give your children what is good, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!'

**Second Reading**

The letter to the Colossians, whether by Paul himself or a follower, was prompted by reports of teachers leading the community astray. They speculated about celestial beings with spiritual powers and advocated dietary practices and ritual observances. Such teaching was anathema because it called into question the complete adequacy of Christ's saving death.

Today Paul spells out how believers in Christ share in the salvation he achieved once and for all. As he had taught in the letter to the Romans (6:3-5), it was by baptism. In the waters of baptism they died and rose with Christ and had their sins forgiven. Mention of forgiveness prompts Paul to introduce the metaphor of debt. The bill of debt, he says, was made null and void by being nailed to the cross.

The message is strong and clear except for a somewhat ambiguous reference to the Colossians being uncircumcised. This simply identifies them as Gentiles; the whole argument makes it clear that Paul is not requiring circumcision of them, quite the opposite.

Readers should be glad to have the opportunity to deliver the good news that this text contains. It is important teaching, deserving of strong and positive proclamation.

**Gospel**

Many may lament the fact that a century or more of ecumenical endeavour has not born fruit in an agreed English translation of the Lord's Prayer. Some might say in reply that there never was one form of the prayer. Luke's version is shorter and simpler than Matthew's. Much has been written to compare the two. One example will have to suffice. In Matthew, Jesus says "pray like this" (6:9), suggesting that the Lord's Prayer is a model, not a fixed set of words, whereas in Luke, Jesus' advice is "Say this when you pray."

The prayer formula is complemented by two instances of teaching. The first is a homely example of persistence in prayer, a virtue already displayed by Abraham in his bargaining with God. The second offers grounds for confidence in the efficacy of prayer, also illustrated in down-to-earth terms, but finishing on a heavenly note. For Luke there is no better prize than the gift of the Holy Spirit.

This is a lengthy text and much of it will be very familiar to the assembly. It will be a measure of the proclaimer's art to deliver it with a freshness and sympathy that captures the assembly's full attention.

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time IV)

May the God of all consolation order our days in his peace  
and grant us the gifts of his blessing.

**Amen.**

May he free us always from every distress  
and confirm our hearts in his love.

**Amen.**

So that on this life's journey  
we may be effective in good works,  
rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity,  
and may come happily to eternal life.

**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 IV, Roman Missal p. 716)