

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twenty-Ninth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year C

16 October 2022



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
grant that we may always conform our will to yours
and serve your majesty in sincerity of heart.
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

“All scripture is inspired by God” declared the author of 2 Timothy, as we hear today. These few words lie at the heart of a scholarly document published in 2014 by the Pontifical Biblical Commission. It was entitled *The Inspiration and Truth of Sacred Scripture: The Word That Comes from God and Speaks of God for the Salvation of the World*. Here are two extracts from it, the first from the Preface, the second from much later in the document.

“The life of the Church is founded on the Word of God. This Word is passed down in Sacred Scripture, namely, in the writings of the Old and New Testaments. According to the faith of the Church, all of these writings are inspired; they have God, who made use of human beings chosen by him for their composition, as their ultimate author.”

“In our study of the inspiration of the biblical writings, we have seen God’s tireless concern to address himself to his people . . . True disciples of Jesus, profoundly moved by faith in their Lord, wrote the books of the New Testament. These books are meant to be heard by true disciples of Jesus (cf. Matt 28:19), filled with living faith in him (cf. John 20:31). It is with the risen Jesus, according to the teaching that Jesus gave his disciples (cf. Luke 24:25-27, 44-47) and from his perspective, that we are called to read the writings of the Old Testament” (#53).

A reading from the book of Exodus 17:8–13

The Amalekites came and attacked Israel at Rephidim. Moses said to Joshua, 'Pick out men for yourself, and tomorrow morning march out to engage Amalek. I, meanwhile will stand on the hilltop, the staff of God in my hand.' Joshua did as Moses told him and marched out to engage Amalek, while Moses and Aaron and Hur went up to the top of the hill. As long as Moses kept his arms raised, Israel had the advantage; when he let his arms fall, the advantage went to Amalek. But Moses' arms grew heavy, so they took a stone and put it under him and on this he sat, Aaron and Hur supporting his arms, one on one side, one on the other; and his arms remained firm until sunset. With the edge of the sword Joshua cut down Amalek and his people.

First Reading

In the course of Moses' first encounter with God at the burning bush on Mt Horeb, his staff was turned into a snake and back again to demonstrate God's power to help Moses in his mission of liberating the Hebrew people (Ex 4:2-5). The staff played its part – as did Moses' outstretched arm – in inflicting the plagues on the Egyptians and parting the waters of the sea for the escaping Israelites.

Now the staff and Moses' outstretched arms contribute to the Israelites' defeat of the marauding Amalekites. Exactly what role they played is not made clear. A religious interpretation would see Moses in a posture of mediation that secured divine assistance for the Israelites. A more mundane view would see him on the hill-top in the stance of commander-in-chief inspiring his warriors to victory. It is noteworthy that Moses needs assistance from Aaron and Hur. A little later in the narrative, Moses' father-in-law Jethro warns him that he cannot do everything by himself (18:18).

Readers should check the pronunciation of "Amalekites," "Rephidim," and "Amalek." That done, they have a lively tale to tell. It begins and ends with general mention of the skirmish, but the substance of the story revolves around Moses, his aides and the power of his posture. It calls for energetic delivery.

Responsorial Psalm

R. Our help is from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

I lift up my eyes to the mountains:
from where shall come my help?
My help shall come from the Lord
who made heaven and earth. **R.**

May he never allow you to stumble!
Let him sleep not, your guard.
No, he sleeps not nor slumbers,
Israel's guard. **R.**

The Lord is your guard and your shade;
at your right side he stands.
By day the sun shall not smite you
nor the moon in the night. **R.**

The Lord will guard you from evil,
he will guard your soul.
The Lord will guard your going and coming
both now and for ever. **R.**

Ps 120

Responsorial Psalm

The whole of Psalm 120/121 serves as the responsorial psalm. Assuming the Israelites in the first reading took heart from the sight of Moses on the hilltop, then Psalm 120/121 is a fitting choice to accompany the story. It starts with the psalmist looking up to the mountain and asking for help from the Lord. He could be a pilgrim looking up to the hills on which the city of Jerusalem and the temple were located, or a traveller in unsafe territory.

At first the psalmist answers his own question, then another person, perhaps a priest or another religious leader, offers a more extended reply. The primary image is that of God as unceasing watchman or guard, with a secondary image of shade from the burning heat or the mysterious light of the moon. Whether one is coming or going, whether by night or day, the Lord offers unfailing help.

The response is adapted from the psalm to make it a communal, rather than an individual, declaration of faith. After the anxious uncertainty of the opening question, the remainder of the psalm is a resounding assertion of God's attentive care. It calls for confident delivery, allied with respect for the short poetic lines and the repetitive imagery.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to Timothy

3:14 – 4:2

You must keep to what you have been taught and know to be true; remember who your teachers were, and how, ever since you were a child, you have known the holy scriptures – from these you can learn the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy. This is how the man who is dedicated to God becomes fully equipped and ready for any good work.

Before God and before Christ Jesus who is to be judge of the living and the dead, I put this duty to you, in the name of his Appearing and of his kingdom: proclaim the message and, welcome or unwelcome, insist on it. Refute falsehood, correct error, call to obedience – but do all with patience and with the intention of teaching.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

18:1–8

Jesus told his disciples a parable about the need to pray continually and never lose heart. 'There was a judge in a certain town' he said who had neither fear of God nor respect for man.

In the same town there was a widow who kept coming to him and saying, "I want justice from you against my enemy!" For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself "Maybe I have neither fear of God nor respect for man, but since she keeps pestering me I must give this widow her just rights, or she will persist in coming and worry me to death."

And the Lord said, 'You notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now will not God see justice done to his chosen who cry to him day and night even when he delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them, and done speedily. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on earth?'

Second Reading

Paul's concern for his teaching to be both faithfully handed on and put into practice is a regular theme of his letters. In his major writings this is infused with all the energy of his own life-changing encounter with the crucified and risen Christ. In the later letters, written perhaps by another in his name, there is a sense of a more settled tradition. The author speaks of "the holy scriptures" (presumably what Christians call the Old Testament) as a source of "the wisdom that leads to salvation." Thus, "All scripture . . . can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy." Having made the point that anyone who is "dedicated to God" like Timothy must be steeped in the word of God, the author embarks on a very solemnly administered charge to him. Calling on God and Christ – "judge of the living and the dead" – he enjoins Timothy to "proclaim the message . . . insist on it . . . correct error . . . call to obedience." This list of tasks may bring the figure of a stern, no-nonsense school-teacher to mind.

Once more the bulk of this text is in the Pauline form of long and complex sentences. Like Timothy, readers have a serious duty, in this instance to proclaim the reading with such clarity that the community can follow its line of thought and understand its message. To do justice to this reading, they will need to study it carefully and rehearse its proclamation thoroughly.

Gospel

It's remarkable how free Jesus is in his story-telling. He's unafraid to give starring roles to characters who are hardly paragons of virtue. It's far from clear, for example, that the prodigal son is truly repentant or simply driven by desperation. Today the limelight is on a judge who grants a widow justice only because she's wearing him out with her persistence (or more literally, because he's afraid she's going to punch him in the face). Both the prodigal son and the judge end up doing the right thing for the wrong reason. It's even possible to imagine that, like the judge, Jesus himself only responded to the pleas of the Syrophenician woman because she got the better of him with her persistence and wit (Mk 7:24-30). Widows, orphans and strangers were the prototypical instances of vulnerability in the Old Testament, while the God of Israel was distinguished as the one who heard their cry (Dt 10:17-18; Eccl 35:14-15). Jesus is drawing on this ancient tradition when he says God "will see justice done to his chosen." Luke then relocates this story-telling event to the time of the Church by referring to God's delaying and to the coming of the Son of Man. The final anguished cry from Jesus – "will he find any faith on earth?" – brings to mind Mark's repeated reference to unbelief (eg 6:6; 8:21).

As Luke discloses right at the start, the parable is "about the need to pray continually and never lose heart." That makes the reading relatively straightforward until the sudden and disconcerting question with which it ends. This is so different from what has gone before that it calls for a brief pause and change of tone.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time V)

May almighty God always keep every adversity far from us
and in his kindness pour out upon us the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May God keep our hearts attentive to his words,
that they may be filled with everlasting gladness.

Amen.

And so, may we always understand what is good and right,
and be found ever hastening along
in the path of God's commands,
made coheirs with the citizens 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 Ordinary Time V, Roman Missal p. 716)