

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

Year A

7 May 2023



### Collect

Almighty ever-living God,  
constantly accomplish the Paschal Mystery within us,  
that those you were pleased to make new in Holy Baptism  
may, under your protective care, bear much fruit  
and come to the joys of life eternal.  
Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,  
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,  
one God, for ever and ever.

**Amen.**

### Readings and Commentaries

Two gems from today's word of God have found their way into the eucharistic prayers of the Roman Missal. One is from Moses' address to the Israelites at Mt Sinai, when he tells them they are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation and God's own people. Adopted by Peter in his first letter and applied to Christian believers, it is the centrepiece of the first preface for Sundays in Ordinary Time.

The other is Jesus' revelation to his disciples that he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. This terse text has been expanded for one of the prefaces of the Eucharistic Prayer for Special Needs and Occasions. Within this prayer addressed to the Father, it speaks of Jesus as "the way that leads to you, the truth that sets us free, the life that fills us with gladness".

The two texts illuminate each other. The more we wonder at the beauty and wisdom of Jesus, the more we see the grace and goodness of God at work in us. We have indeed been set apart to sing the praises of God who called us out of darkness into his wonderful light.

### **A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 6:1–7**

About this time, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Hellenists made a complaint against the Hebrews: in the daily distribution their own widows were being overlooked. So the Twelve called a full meeting of the disciples and addressed them, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the word of God so as to give out food; you, brothers, must select from among yourselves seven men of good reputation, filled with the Spirit and with wisdom; we will hand over this duty to them, and continue to devote ourselves to prayer and to the service of the word.' The whole assembly approved of this proposal and elected Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, together with Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolaus of Antioch, a convert to Judaism. They presented these to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.

The word of the Lord continued to spread: the number of disciples in Jerusalem was greatly increased, and a large group of priests made their submission to the faith.

### **First Reading**

Luke's idyllic descriptions of the early Christian community in Jerusalem are leavened with a dose of reality as time goes on. Today we hear of division between two groups, Greek speakers of Hellenistic heritage, and Aramaic speakers of Palestinian descent. Typically Luke identifies the disadvantaged ones as socially vulnerable widows. He also calls the members of the community "disciples" for the first time.

It's notable that the problem of the widows' neglect is dealt with at a "full meeting of the disciples". The selection of candidates for their ministry is done by election and confirmed by the Twelve with prayer and the laying on of hands. Seven is a meaning-laden figure in the scriptures, here perhaps suggesting the number of Gentile nations in the land, complementing the twelve tribes of Israel. The names of all seven are Greek in origin.

Ironically, even though the seven were endorsed "to give out food," they are never described as doing so. Only two, Stephen and Philip, are ever mentioned again and their ministry is the very one the Twelve claim as their own, proclaiming the word of God. Another surprise, given their antipathy to Jesus, is Luke's reference to the many priests who "made their submission to the faith".

This reading tells the story of a significant development in the life of the community. Once readers have checked the pronunciation of all the proper names, they should deliver it with strength and confidence and draw the assembly into its positive dynamic.

### **Responsorial Psalm Ps 32:1–2, 4–5, 18–19**

**R.** Lord, let your mercy be on us,  
as we place our trust in you.

or

**R.** Alleluia.

Ring out your joy to the Lord, O you just;  
for praise is fitting for loyal hearts.  
Give thanks to the Lord upon the harp,  
with a ten-stringed lute sing him songs. **R.**

For the word of the Lord is faithful  
and all his works to be trusted.  
The Lord loves justice and right  
and fills the earth with his love. **R.**

The Lord looks on those who revere him,  
on those who hope in his love,  
to rescue their souls from death,  
to keep them alive in famine. **R.**

### **Responsorial Psalm**

At first blush, the response to the responsorial psalm – "Lord, let your mercy be on us, as we place our trust in you" – may give the impression that Psalm 32/33 is a plea for help in time of trouble. Nothing could be further from the truth. The entire psalm is a hymn of praise for God who created heaven and earth and who has providentially guided God's chosen people.

The words of the response serve as the conclusion to the psalm and as such sum up the people's confidence in God's steadfast love, manifest in creation and in their history. While the psalm long predates the birth of the Christian community, it is filled with the same spirit of joy that enlivens the Easter season. It may have been chosen for today because its passing reference to famine tied in with the widows' missing out on food in the first reading.

Once readers take the usual care when announcing the two-line response, they should pray the verses with ease. The language is uncomplicated, the structure regular and the spirit upbeat.

### **A reading from the first letter of St Peter 2:4–9**

The Lord is the living stone, rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him; set yourselves close to him so that you too, the holy priesthood that offers the spiritual sacrifices which Jesus Christ has made acceptable to God, may be living stones making a spiritual house. As scripture says: See how I lay in Zion a precious cornerstone that I have chosen and the man who rests his trust on it will not be disappointed. That means that for you who are believers, it is precious; but for unbelievers, the stone rejected by the builders has proved to be the keystone, a stone to stumble over, a rock to bring men down. They stumble over it because they do not believe in the word; it was the fate in store for them.

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God who called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light.

### **A reading from the holy Gospel according to John**

**14:1–12**

Jesus said to his disciples:

‘Do not let your hearts be troubled.  
Trust in God still, and trust in me.  
There are many rooms in my Father’s house;  
if there were not, I should have told you.  
I am now going to prepare a place for you,  
and after I have gone and prepared you a place,  
I shall return to take you with me;  
so that where I am you may be too.  
You know the way to the place where I am going.’

Thomas said, ‘Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can we know the way?’ Jesus said:

‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life.  
No one can come to the Father except through me.  
If you know me, you know my Father too.  
From this moment you know him and have seen him.’

Philip said, ‘Lord, let us see the Father and then we shall be satisfied.’ ‘Have I been with you all this time, Philip,’ said Jesus to him ‘and you still do not know me?’

‘To have seen me is to have seen the Father,  
so how can you say, “Let us see the Father”?  
Do you not believe that I am in the Father  
and the Father is in me?  
The words I say to you I do not speak as from myself:  
it is the Father, living in me, who is doing this work.  
You must believe me when I say  
that I am in the Father and the Father is in me;  
believe it on the evidence of this work,  
if for no other reason.

‘I tell you most solemnly,  
whoever believes in me  
will perform the same works as I do myself,  
he will perform even greater works,  
because I am going to the Father.’

### **Second Reading**

Further evidence that the First Letter of Peter was written to encourage Christians living in an unsympathetic, if not hostile, society is provided in today’s reading. The author weaves together a number of Old Testament texts to remind them of Christ’s rejection and vindication and their own glorious vocation.

Christ, the stone once rejected by the builders, has become the cornerstone. There’s much play with this stone image. Christ is the “living stone” and a “keystone”. For unbelievers, he’s “a stone to stumble over,” but for believers “a precious cornerstone”. Christian believers are now themselves “living stones making a spiritual house”.

The climax of the reading is the depiction of the believers’ high calling. They are “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a consecrated nation, a people set apart to sing the praises of God”. Some may be surprised to find that none of this is new. It’s what God told Moses to say to the Israelites at Mt Sinai (Ex 19:5-6), now simply restated in the light of the Christ event.

It would be of value for readers to identify the several quotations from the Hebrew scriptures and see how they contribute to the argument the author is making. This is a reading to be taken at a deliberate pace, allowing the assembly to be gradually drawn to its splendid finale.

### **Gospel**

Much has happened since Jesus’ declaration of himself as the good shepherd. He has raised Lazarus, been anointed by Mary, entered Jerusalem on a donkey, washed his disciples’ feet and supped with them for the last time. In that intimate setting, as we hear today, he proceeds to share his wisdom with them. A good deal of John’s gospel is concerned with the question of who Jesus is and where he has come from. Now it’s a matter of where he is going.

Time and again in this gospel, Jesus presents teaching that’s not understood at the necessary depth, prompting his listeners to question him. In this case it’s Thomas and Philip who are the foil for further explanation. Following the initial revelation that he was going to his “Father’s house,” Jesus now identifies himself as “the Way, the Truth and the Life”. He goes even further by declaring “I am in the Father and the Father is in me”. Those who hear his words and see his work are called to believe, and as believers will perform their own works. The necessary condition is that Jesus must go to the Father and establish a new kind of relationship with them.

This text is rich in the wisdom of Jesus. It calls for thoughtful and sensitive proclamation, offering the assembly time to digest its fine fare.

## 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.)