

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

2 August 2020



### Collect

Draw near to your servants, O Lord,  
and answer their prayers with unceasing kindness,  
that, for those who glory in you as their Creator and guide,  
you may restore what you have created  
and keep safe what you have restored.  
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

Jesus taught in parables, as we've seen over the past three Sundays. Today we see that there's more than one way of doing this. Parables can be taught in actions as well as words. The feeding of the crowd in the wilderness with the five loaves and two fish is such an action. Today's gospel story could have begun with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like . . ."

This manifestation of the kingdom made such an impression on Jesus' disciples that they preserved six accounts of it: two each in Matthew and Mark, one in each of Luke and John. It roused memories of many things in the Jewish tradition – the manna in the desert, the giving of the Law through Moses, the shepherding of Israel by prophets and kings, the invitations to Wisdom's banquet. The first reading is an example of the latter.

It also evoked the whole meal ministry of Jesus and the table fellowship of the early Christian community. All the more reason for us to join Paul in his enthusiastic confession of faith in the "love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord" from which nothing can separate us.

**A reading from the prophet Isaiah 55:1–3**

Thus says the Lord:

Oh, come to the water all you who are thirsty;  
though you have no money, come!  
Buy corn without money, and eat,  
and, at no cost, wine and milk.  
Why spend money on what is not bread,  
your wages on what fails to satisfy?  
Listen, listen to me and you will have good things  
to eat  
and rich food to enjoy.  
Pay attention, come to me;  
listen, and your soul will live.  
With you I will make an everlasting covenant  
out of the favours promised to David.

**First Reading**

At the Easter Vigil we may have heard a reading of chapter 55 from the book of the prophet Isaiah. A few Sundays ago we heard the conclusion of that reading. It reassured us that God's word always achieves its purpose. Today we return to the first few verses of the chapter.

In God's name the prophet issues an invitation to a banquet of free food and drink, a banquet of water, wine, corn and milk, a banquet of "good things" and "rich foods". The repetition of the command to listen – "listen, listen . . . pay attention . . . listen" – suggests that the banquet menu is a metaphor for the word of God. Those who listen and attend to God's word will find life freely given.

The style of the reading is that of a hawker who needs to shout his sales pitch out loud to catch people's attention. It is not suggested that readers should proclaim the text with volume like that, but they do need to convey how insistently the invitation is being offered. The whole passage is a series of urgent imperatives: "come, come, buy, eat, listen . . .", all of which lead to the concluding promise of an "everlasting covenant." We are meant to hear all this as an offer we cannot afford to refuse.

**Responsorial Psalm Ps 144:8-9, 15-18**

**R.** The hand of the Lord feeds us:  
he answers all our needs.  
The Lord is kind and full of compassion,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.  
How good is the Lord to all,  
compassionate to all his creatures. **R.**  
The eyes of all creatures look to you  
and you give them their food in due time.  
You open wide your hand,  
grant the desires of all who live. **R.**  
The Lord is just in all his ways  
and loving in all his deeds.  
He is close to all who call him,  
call on him from their hearts. **R.**

**Responsorial Psalm**

Psalm 144/145 is such a positive hymn in praise of God's goodness that it is the source of several responsorial psalms in the course of the liturgical year.

Today's response, however, is quite rare. It only appears around this time in Years A and B. This means that the congregation will be unfamiliar with it. To add to this difficulty, the response is relatively long and joins together two parallel affirmations. Readers will need to announce it clearly and with deliberation. A slight upward intonation at the end of the first line will alert the congregation to the fact that there is more to come. A downward intonation at the end of the second line, accompanied by a glance at the assembly, will cue them in at the right moment for their response.

The verses are uniform both in size and tone. They are variations on the theme of God's loving-kindness and should be easily proclaimed in a spirit of praise and thanks.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul to the Romans**  
**8:35,37–39**

Nothing can come between us and the love of Christ, even if we are troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked. These are the trials through which we triumph, by the power of him who loved us.

For I am certain of this: neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power, or height or depth, nor any created thing, can ever come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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

**14:13–21**

When Jesus received the news of John the Baptist's death he withdrew by boat to a lonely place where they could be by themselves. But the people heard of this and, leaving the towns, went after him on foot. So as he stepped ashore he saw a large crowd; and he took pity on them and healed their sick.

When evening came, the disciples went to him and said, 'This is a lonely place, and the time has slipped by; so send the people away, and they can go to the villages to buy themselves some food.' Jesus replied, 'There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves.' But they answered, 'All we have with us is five loaves and two fish.' 'Bring them here to me,' he said. He gave orders that the people were to sit down on the grass; then he took the five loaves and the two fish, raised his eyes to heaven and said the blessing. And breaking the loaves he handed them to his disciples who gave them to the crowds. They all ate as much as they wanted, and they collected the scraps remaining, twelve baskets full, Those who ate numbered about five thousand men, to say nothing of women and children.

**Second Reading**

As he heads towards the conclusion of this part of his letter, Paul allows his rhetoric free rein. It culminates in a resounding declaration of confidence in God.

His wind-up begins a few verses earlier, at 8:31. This introduction is worth searching out. Our reading begins at verse 35 but omits verse 36. This is an aside that has been dispensed with because it interrupts the flow.

The reading falls into two parts, each of which has a litany. In the first part, it is a list of earthly trials: being "troubled or worried, or being persecuted, or lacking food or clothes, or being threatened or even attacked." In the second the roll-call of potential threats becomes cosmic but none of them can overcome us: "neither death nor life, no angel, no prince, nothing that exists, nothing still to come, not any power or height or depth, nor any created thing" can separate us from the love of God.

This is an overwhelming vote of confidence in the all-embracing love of God. Paul casts his net widely to include all believers no matter what kind of afflictions beset them. Readers need to take their time with each of the two litanies to allow everyone in the congregation to acknowledge their human condition and find reassurance.

**Gospel**

As suggested in the introduction, the story of the feeding of the crowd must have been valued highly in the early Christian community. In addition to being retold six times, it is the only miracle common to all four gospels.

Some might want to argue that it is an entire gospel in miniature. It offers the revelation that Jesus is the long-awaited Son of David (see Matt 1:1), the shepherd-king who looks after his flock, feeds them, and leads them to safety. At the same time it is a story of mission – the mission of the church to feed the hungers of humanity. Jesus said to the disciples, "There is no need for them to go: give them something to eat yourselves."

The six feeding stories have intriguing variations but the substance of each one is the same. In Jesus, God is gathering his people, nourishing them, and sending them out. It is a deservedly much loved story that never fails to stir our hearts.

## Concluding Prayers

Almighty and all-merciful God,  
lover of the human race, healer of all our wounds,  
in whom there is no shadow of death,  
save us in this time of crisis;  
grant wisdom and courage to our leaders;  
watch over all medical people  
as they tend the sick and work for a cure;  
stir in us a sense of solidarity beyond all isolation;  
if our doors are closed, let our hearts be open.  
By the power of your love destroy the virus of fear,  
that hope may never die  
and the light of Easter, the triumph of life,  
may shine upon us and the whole world.  
Through Jesus Christ, the Lord risen from the dead,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever.  
Amen.

Holy Mary, health of the sick, pray for us.  
St Joseph, guardian of us all, pray for us.

*(Most Rev. Mark Coleridge, Archbishop of Brisbane)*

*or*

Gracious God,  
We give thanks anew for your providence and presence.  
We prayerfully seek your grace, amidst COVID-19 here and overseas.  
We pray for those in need of healing.  
We pray for your peace with those who are anxious or grieving.  
We pray you will continue to strengthen and sustain  
all those who are serving in response.  
We pray for your Holy Spirit's discernment  
amidst the many choices and decisions  
facing our national, community and medical leaders.  
We pray we each might see quickly what more we can do  
to help those who are vulnerable.  
This prayer for our nation in the family of nations,  
with all that is on our hearts,  
we gather now and pray  
through Jesus Christ our Lord.  
Amen.

*(Ecumenical prayer from the National Council of Churches. We have been invited to pray this prayer at 7pm each day.)*