

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

Thirteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

27 June 2021



### Collect

O God, who through the grace of adoption  
chose us to be children of light,  
grant, we pray,  
that we may not be wrapped in the darkness of error  
but always be seen to stand in the bright light of truth.  
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

Try as we may, we cannot long avoid facing the question put to us by pain, illness and death. Even if we have been personally blessed with good health and a happy life, we are inevitably affected by the sickness and suffering of those we love. And every one of us must die, no matter how much we deny it to ourselves. Do we wrestle with this dark mystery? Every generation of humankind before us has done so. In our own time the terrible pain suffered by innocent people, especially children, has added fresh fuel to the arguments of the God-deniers.

It may surprise some to learn that belief in life beyond death came very late and uncertainly in the Jewish tradition, perhaps only a few generations before the time of Jesus. It is even more shocking to realise that Jesus gave no explanation for the problem of suffering, no rational argument to reconcile human anguish and distress with belief in a loving God. What he did was offer striking testimony – the testimony of his power to heal and save, and the testimony of courage and trust in his own hour of darkness.

Every Sunday eucharist is testimony to God's vindication of Jesus. It assures us that pain, suffering and death are not the last word. The last word is always God's, and that word is Emmanuel, God-with-us.

## A reading from the book of Wisdom 1:13–15; 2:23–24

Death was not God's doing,  
he takes no pleasure in the extinction of the living.  
To be - for this he created all;  
the world's created things have health in them,  
in them no fatal poison can be found,  
and Hades holds no power on earth;  
for virtue is undying.  
Yet God did make man imperishable,  
he made him in the image of his own nature;  
it was the devil's envy that brought death into the world,  
as those who are his partners will discover.

## First Reading

The book of Wisdom is recognised by Catholic and Orthodox Churches, but not in Jewish or Protestant traditions. Scholars suggest it is the work of a Jewish author well versed in Greek thought and culture, writing in the Egyptian city of Alexandria a century or two before Christ. His aim is to support his fellow Jews by presenting Jewish faith and practice favourably in comparison with the religious and philosophical teachings of the Greeks and Egyptians.

At the same time the author introduces a Greek notion that is new to Jewish tradition – the idea of the immortality of the soul. He presents this as God's gift to the righteous (see 2:22, a verse not included in today's reading). Thus the possibility of some kind of existence beyond physical death comes late in Jewish thinking.

The reading is a combination of three verses from Chapter 1 and two from Chapter 2. It is short but not simple, being a poetic and philosophical reflection in the setting of ancient Jewish faith. Its literary style and mode of thought make it challenging for the reader to proclaim and for the assembly to grasp. In particular the transition between the two parts of the reading is made difficult by the word "Yet", which seems to put the second part in opposition to the first instead of in support (note that the NRSV has "For").

Readers will need to invest time and effort into their preparation and to proclaim the text with careful emphasis and at a moderately slow pace. The assembly needs to hear the key assertion – "God did make man imperishable, he made him in the image of his own nature" – as the unmistakable highlight of the passage.

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 29:2, 4–6, 11–13

**R.** I will praise you, Lord,  
for you have rescued me.

I will praise you, Lord, you have rescued me  
and have not let my enemies rejoice over me.  
O Lord, you have raised my soul from the dead,  
restored me to life from those who sink into the  
grave. **R.**

Sing psalms to the Lord, you who love him,  
give thanks to his holy name.  
His anger lasts but a moment: his favour through life.  
At night there are tears, but joy comes with dawn. **R.**

The Lord listened and had pity.  
The Lord came to my help.  
For me you have changed my mourning into dancing,  
O Lord my God, I will thank you for ever. **R.**

## Responsorial Psalm

This particular responsorial psalm is allocated to a number of Sundays and to the Easter vigil. It is drawn from Psalm 29/30, a song of praise and thanksgiving for deliverance. The psalmist seems to have had an experience like that of Job, being laid low by the loss of prosperity and well-being. In the distress he faces – probably a life-threatening illness – he pleads for help and is saved. For this he gives thanks and praise. His prayer is prompted by being saved from actually dying. As such it does not imply faith in life beyond death. The fate of those who die is to "sink into the grave".

Used in the context of Christian worship, we can first imagine it as the prayer of Lazarus, restored to life in this world by Jesus. Beyond that, we can hear it as the prayer of the risen Lord himself, raised out of death into immortality.

The overall tone is one of great rejoicing, and this is the spirit in which the verses should be proclaimed. At the same time there are phrases which call for quieter delivery, such as "His anger lasts a moment" and "At night there are tears". Readers will need to take care with the longer lines and make sure they maintain momentum through to the end.

**A reading from the second letter of St Paul  
to the Corinthians 8:7, 9, 13–15**

You always have the most of everything - of faith, of eloquence, of understanding, of keenness for any cause, and the biggest share of our affection - so we expect you to put the most into this work of mercy too. Remember how generous the Lord Jesus was: he was rich, but he became poor for your sake, to make you rich out of his poverty. This does not mean that to give relief to others you ought to make things difficult for yourselves: it is a question of balancing what happens to be your surplus now against their present need, and one day they may have something to spare that will supply your own need. That is how we strike a balance: as scripture says: The man who gathered much had none too much, the man who gathered little did not go short.

**A reading from the holy Gospel  
according to Mark 5:21–43**

When Jesus had crossed in the boat to the other side, a large crowd gathered round him and he stayed by the lakeside. Then one of the synagogue officials came up, Jairus by name, and seeing him, fell at his feet and pleaded with him earnestly, saying, 'My little daughter is desperately sick. Do come and lay your hands on her to make her better and save her life.' Jesus went with him and a large crowd followed him; they were pressing all round him.

[Now there was a woman who had suffered from a haemorrhage for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it, in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus, and she came up behind him through the crowd and touched his cloak. 'If I can touch his clothes,' she had told herself 'I will be well again.' And the source of the bleeding dried up instantly, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. Immediately aware that power had gone out of him, Jesus turned around in the crowd and said, 'Who touched my clothes?' His disciples said to him, 'You see how the crowd is pressing round you and yet you say, "Who touched me?"' But he continued to look all round to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward, frightened and trembling because she knew what had happened to her, and she fell at his feet and told him the whole truth. 'My daughter,' he said 'your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free from your complaint.'

While he was still speaking] some people arrived from the house of the synagogue official to say, 'Your daughter is dead: why put the Master to any further trouble?' But Jesus had overheard this remark of theirs and he said to the official, 'Do not be afraid; only have faith.' And he allowed no one to go with him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. So they came to the official's house and Jesus noticed all the commotion, with people weeping and wailing unrestrainedly. He went in and said to them, 'Why all this commotion and crying? The child is not dead, but asleep.' But they laughed at him. So he turned them all out and, taking with him the child's father and mother and his own companions, he went into the place where the child lay. And taking the child by the hand he said to her, 'Talitha, kum!' which means, 'Little girl, I tell you to get up.' The little girl got up at once and began to walk about, for she was twelve years old. At this they were overcome with astonishment, and he ordered them strictly not to let anyone know about it, and told them to give her something to eat.

[Short Form: omit text in brackets.]

**Second Reading**

Whether 2 Corinthians was originally a single letter or is a combination of several letters written at different times, Chapters 8 and 9 form a unit devoted to a cause cherished by Paul. His project is a collection for the Christian community in Jerusalem; it seems to have been in great need of financial assistance.

Paul appeals vigorously to the Church communities of Asia Minor to come to the aid of their fellow believers in Jerusalem. In addition to the practical purpose of the collection, Paul seems to have a double aim in mind: to affirm the bond between the "Mother Church" and her young offspring and that between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

Whether readers are prospective fund-raisers or not, it will be worth their while to read the two chapters in full to see what persuasive devices Paul uses to win the support of the Corinthians for his project. In today's extract he's prepared to flatter, play on emotion, argue theologically and appeal to reason. All of this invites the reader to proclaim the text with something of Paul's passion for his cause.

A significant disadvantage for the reader is that, unless alerted in advance by a commentator, the assembly is unlikely to know what Paul is referring to when he writes of "this work of mercy". Nonetheless, what follows is clear and strong: the Lord Jesus became poor for our sake, that we might become rich in him.

**Gospel**

Today's gospel comes in a shorter and a longer form. The longer form is an instance of Mark's habit of incorporating one story inside another. In this case he interrupts his account of the raising of Jairus' daughter in order to include the episode of the woman healed of her haemorrhage before returning to complete the original story. The shorter form simply omits the "story within the story". It would seem better to respect Mark's intentions and proclaim the longer text, unless pastoral reasons dictate otherwise. Both stories are told with Mark's usual flair for colour, movement and drama, and thus should readily hold the assembly's attention if well read.

Many details catch our attention. Jairus the synagogue official is willing to make a public display of his feeling whereas the unnamed woman's efforts to remain unnoticed are thwarted; the faith of each is critical for the exercise of Jesus' power; touch plays a key role in both events; Jesus acts with sovereign freedom – he disregards the woman's ritual uncleanness as well as the mocking of the mourners; the woman has suffered for twelve years, the very age of the unnamed girl at which she might be expected to begin to menstruate; Peter, James and John are singled out as at the transfiguration and at Gethsemane; and the words used to describe the young woman's revival are the same as those used for resurrection.

The retelling of these familiar stories invites us to renew our faith in the power of Jesus to heal and give life. He is really present to us in the word that is well proclaimed and taken to heart.

## Concluding Prayer

### Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time VI)

May God bless us with every heavenly blessing,  
make us always holy and pure in his sight,  
pour out in abundance upon us the riches of his glory,  
and teach us with the words of truth;  
may he instruct us in the Gospel of salvation,  
and ever endow us with fraternal charity.  
Through Christ our Lord.

**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 VI, Roman Missal p. 717)