

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

12th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year A

21 June 2020



Collect

Grant, O Lord,
that we may always revere and love your holy name,
for you never deprive of your guidance
those you set firm on the foundation of your love.
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

The saying, "It takes all sorts to make a world", may have appeared sometime in the 1600s, but the Bible anticipated its truth a long time before that. Right from the start the scriptures present a procession of characters extraordinarily different from one another, and by no means paragons of virtue, yet each with a part to play in the saga of God's love affair with humankind.

Today we hear from one of the most tortured personalities in the whole of the scriptures, the prophet Jeremiah. His unwelcome message of submission to the imperial power of Babylon made him the target not just of vilification but of murderous plots on his life. He does not hesitate to lament his invidious situation and complain loud and long before God.

Could anyone be more different from Jeremiah than Australia's own Mary MacKillop? Her acceptance of the cross and submission to God's will led her to write: "Whatever troubles may be before you, accept them bravely, remembering Whom you are trying to follow. Do not be afraid. Love one another, bear with one another, and let charity guide you all your life. God will reward you as only He can". No Jeremiah-like protest here! So we should say, "It takes all sorts to make the kingdom of God".

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah 20:10–13

Jeremiah said:

I hear so many disparaging me,
‘“Terror from every side!”
Denounce him! Let us denounce him!’
All those who used to be my friends
watched for my downfall,
‘Perhaps he will be seduced into error.
Then we will master him and take our revenge!’
But the Lord is at my side, a mighty hero;
my opponents will stumble, mastered,
confounded by their failure;
everlasting, unforgettable disgrace will be theirs.
But you, Lord of Hosts, you who probe with justice,
who scrutinise the loins and heart,
let me see the vengeance you will take on them,
for I have committed my cause to you.
Sing to the Lord,
praise the Lord,
for he has delivered the soul of the needy
from the hands of evil men.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 68:8–10, 14, 17, 33–35

R. Lord, in your great love, answer me.

It is for you that I suffer taunts,
that shame covers my face,
that I have become a stranger to my brothers,
an alien to my own mother’s sons.
I burn with zeal for your house
and taunts against you fall on me. **R.**

This is my prayer to you,
my prayer for your favour.
In your great love, answer me, O God,
with your help that never fails:
Lord, answer, for your love is kind;
in your compassion, turn towards me. **R.**

The poor when they see it will be glad
and God-seeking hearts will revive;
for the Lord listens to the needs
and does not spurn servants in their chains.
Let the heavens and the earth give him praise,
the sea and all its living creatures. **R.**

First Reading

The book of the prophet Jeremiah is interwoven with several heartfelt laments. Faced with ridicule, rejection and persecution Jeremiah complains bitterly to God and cries for help. Today’s reading is an extract from one of these laments or “confessions” of Jeremiah.

In the passage we have, Jeremiah first paints a picture of the mockery and violence he is up against. Then he goes on to affirm his trust in the Lord who “is at my side, a mighty hero” and the one to whom “I have committed my cause”. The reading finishes with what seems to be a verse from a psalm, confidently praising God for deliverance.

Those who go to the trouble of taking up their Bibles to read through the whole lament (20:7–18) may be shocked and scandalised at the violent language of the verses that precede and follow today’s text. In verses 7–9, Jeremiah accuses God of virtually raping him, seducing him by superior strength into his fateful mission. And in verses 14–18, the prophet repeatedly curses the day of his birth, fiercely lamenting that he ever came to be.

That aside, readers have a challenge with what they are to proclaim. The first part of the reading is Jeremiah’s complaint about the opposition to him; this includes two quotes from his enemies. Both Jeremiah’s lament and the voices against him need to be delivered with a certain drama but clearly distinguished from one another. Then the reader needs to pause for a moment before proceeding with Jeremiah’s ringing vote of confidence in God and the final verse of praise.

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 68/69 is a lengthy lament. The psalmist pleads with God for deliverance from various forms of distress – physical suffering, isolation, accusation and persecution. The first Christians interpreted a number of passages from this psalm as referring to the unjust suffering of the innocent Jesus, thus giving rise to its use during Holy Week.

The response expresses the psalmist’s plea for help. The first of the three verses echoes the lament of Jeremiah in the face of hostility and scorn; the remaining two verses are not so anguished. The emphasis shifts from the plight of the petitioner to the goodness and trustworthiness of God. The references to struggle and suffering – “the poor”, “the needy”, and “chains” – are in the minor key, God’s love is in the major.

Readers should do their best to convey the changing mood of the verses, ranging as they do from heartfelt pleading to confident trust.

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

5:12–15

Sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned. Sin existed in the world long before the Law was given. There was no law and so no one could be accused of the sin of 'law-breaking', yet death reigned over all from Adam to Moses, even though their sin, unlike that of Adam, was not a matter of breaking a law.

Adam prefigured the One to come, but the gift itself considerably outweighed the fall. If it is certain that through one man's fall so many died, it is even more certain that divine grace, coming through the one man, Jesus Christ, came to so many as an abundant free gift.

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

10:26–33

Jesus instructed the Twelve as follows: 'Do not be afraid. For everything that is now covered will be uncovered, and everything now hidden will be made clear. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the daylight; what you hear in whispers, proclaim from the house-tops.

'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; fear him rather who can destroy both body and soul in hell. Can you not buy two sparrows for a penny? And yet not one falls to the ground without your Father knowing. Why, every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.

'So if anyone declares himself for me in the presence of men, I will declare myself for him in the presence of my Father in heaven. But the one who disowns me in the presence of men, I will disown in the presence of my Father in heaven.'

Second Reading

This is quite a difficult text to follow and therefore to proclaim. To begin with, it assumes knowledge of the Genesis story of the sin of the first human beings. It also demands a grasp of Paul's rabbinical mode of argumentation and an understanding of his rhetorical style. It may comfort the reader to know that this passage has generated intense theological debate from the time of Saint Augustine down to our own day. There is still no complete agreement about its meaning.

The overall point of the reading is clear enough: the disobedience of the first human being ("Adam") brought death and sin for everyone, while the obedience of Jesus Christ won grace and life for all. This reversal is not simply a balancing of the ledger. Paul asserts that there is no comparison between the consequences of Adam's sin and the abundance of grace that flows from Christ; the latter far outweighs the former. "Divine grace" is an "abundant free gift" which we have not earned.

Readers will do more justice to this short but complex text if they read it through thoroughly several times. They may not be able to grasp Paul's line of argument about law and sin and death in full, but they should aim to make it as intelligible as possible for the congregation and be sure that the message of the last sentence is heard loud and clear.

Gospel

The background to today's text is Jesus' selection of the twelve apostles (10:1–4) and the instructions he gives them for their mission. The gospel selections for this Sunday and the next conclude these instructions.

The passage for today (like the verses that precede it) has some similarity to the apocalyptic discourse of Jesus found in each of the synoptic gospels between his triumphal entry into Jerusalem and the beginning of his passion. It has the same theme of heroic endurance in the face of upheaval, betrayal and persecution.

Placed here, it serves to warn the Twelve at the very outset of their mission about the opposition they will face. Although permeated by ominous references, Jesus' teaching is affirmative. The apostles are to speak out boldly; whatever human beings may threaten to do, they are not to be afraid. This injunction recurs like a refrain three times. All the same, there is an appropriate fear – holy awe for the one who has ultimate power over life and death.

In a world in which religious persecution is rife, not least against Christian believers, this is timely teaching, to be delivered with due deliberation.

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.)