

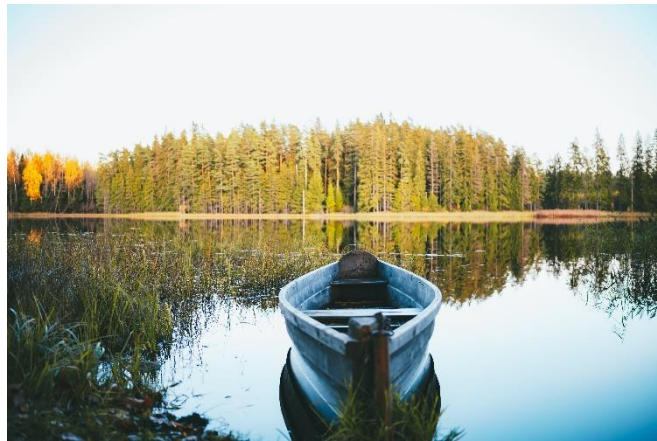
SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

23 June 2024



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

There's something rather comic in the fact that Jesus, the son of a carpenter, is unruffled by the wild waves of the sea, while his disciples, some of whom were certainly seasoned fishermen, are the ones who are terrified. Mark may have taken poetic license in his crafting of the story but in so doing has offered us food for thought.

As more than one spiritual guide has observed, the disciples are intent on getting Jesus to share their fear. Jesus, on the other hand, is wordlessly inviting them to share his calm. This is not to say the danger wasn't real, nor is it to discount the threats we face in our daily lives. They can loom large. We can feel we are drowning in a sea of troubles. Jesus never suggests we delude ourselves and resort to denial and self-deception. He was open-eyed about what happened to prophets like him. To follow him is to face our fears and dare to trust.

That means taking to heart what Paul famously wrote to the Romans: "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" (8:38-39).

A reading from the book of Job 38:1, 8-11

From the heart of the tempest the Lord gave Job his answer.

He said:

Who pent up the sea behind closed doors
when it leapt tumultuous out of the womb,
when I wrapped it in a robe of mist
and made black clouds its swaddling bands;
when I marked the bounds it was not to cross
and made it fast with a bolted gate?
Come thus far, I said, and no farther;
here your proud waves shall break.

First Reading

The book of Job is long (forty-two chapters), cosmic in scope, poetic in form, and profoundly challenging in thought. Rather strangely, the Sunday lectionary contains only two very short extracts, one on the 5th and the other on the 12th Sunday of Ordinary Time in Year B. Today's passage comes from late in the work. After thirty-seven chapters of scene-setting, lamenting, questioning and human debating, at last God speaks. In the few verses that we hear, God throws down the gauntlet to Job. The reading provides no background or context for God's words and the reason for its selection will not become clear until the gospel is read. This puts the assembly at a great disadvantage. Those who are familiar with the book will know that Job has been questioning why he, a perfectly innocent man, should suffer so abominably.

God's reply is not an answer to Job's questions but an emphatic affirmation of divine power and majesty. In this fragment, God speaks of the authority with which the chaotic energy of the sea has been contained. It is but one instance in a litany of divine activity that testifies to God's omnipotence and to human beings' incapacity to grasp the mystery of God. No wonder that, in verses we do not hear, this powerful poetic onslaught reduces Job to silence (40:4-5).

Given the high poetic style of the passage and its lack of context, it would assist the assembly's understanding if readers proclaimed it with solemn deliberation.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 106:23-26, 28-31

R. Give thanks to the Lord, his love is everlasting.

or

R. Alleluia!

Some sailed to the sea in ships
to trade on the mighty waters.
These men have seen the Lord's deeds,
the wonders he does in the deep. **R.**

For he spoke; he summoned the gale,
tossing the waves of the sea
up to heaven and back into the deep;
their soul melted away in their distress. **R.**

Then they cried to the Lord in their need
and he rescued them from their distress.
He stilled the storm to a whisper:
all the waves of the sea were hushed. **R.**

They rejoiced because of the calm
and he led them to the haven they desired.
Let them thank the Lord for his love,
the wonders he does for men. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Psalm 106/107 is a rather long prayer which offers four examples of peril from which human beings are rescued by God. Accordingly, it calls them to give thanks for their deliverance. The four life-threatening predicaments are the trackless desert, imprisonment, mortal illness and stormy seas. The verses chosen for the responsorial psalm deal with the last of these, thus tying in with the passage from Job but in a totally different spirit. They also anticipate the gospel story. Each of the four examples follows the same pattern – a description of the crisis, the cry for help, God's saving answer, and the thanksgiving it prompts. The response for the psalm anticipates the happy outcome of the episode. Readers will note that it is composed of two statements side by side, each of which calls for distinct proclamation with a moment's pause between the two.

The whole drama is captured in the four verses. It's colourfully described and propelled by both physical and emotional energy. It lends itself naturally to a strong and lively delivery, one that respects the fact that psalms are poetic prayer. The NRSV lectionary offers an inclusive text with a different rendition of the response.

A reading from the second letter of St Paul to the Corinthians **5:14-17**

The love of Christ overwhelms us when we reflect that if one man has died for all, then all men should be dead; and the reason he died for all was so that living men should live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised to life for them.

From now onwards, therefore, we do not judge anyone by the standards of the flesh. Even if we did once know Christ in the flesh, that is not how we know him now. And for anyone who is in Christ, there is a new creation; the old creation has gone, and now the new one is here.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark **4:35-41**

With the coming of evening, Jesus said to his disciples, 'Let us cross over to the other side.' And leaving the crowd behind they took him, just as he was, in the boat; and there were other boats with him. Then it began to blow a gale and the waves were breaking into the boat so that it was almost swamped. But he was in the stern, his head on the cushion, asleep. They woke him and said to him, 'Master, do you not care? We are going down!' And he woke up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Quiet now! Be calm!' And the wind dropped, and all was calm again. Then he said to them, 'Why are you so frightened? How is it that you have no faith?' They were filled with awe and said to one another, 'Who can this be? Even the wind and the sea obey him.'

Second Reading

It may not be apparent from the lectionary text, but Paul is in the process of vigorously defending himself from criticism of his apostolic ministry. He does this here by arguing that he is operating on the basis of a completely new principle, the self-sacrificing love of Christ. This has immense implications both for him and for others. For him, because it determines how he understands his ministry; for others, because it entails nothing less than a re-creation of their whole being.

He wants everyone to do what he has done, namely to abandon conventional standards of judgement that rely on appearance and worldly norms ("the standards of the flesh"). Now what matters is to live for Christ in a new mode of existence, made possible by participating in Christ's selfless dying and being raised to life. Paul would have been familiar with the prophet Isaiah's oracles that announced God's work of making all things new (eg 65:17). This has been accomplished in Christ.

These are encouraging and inspiring words from Paul. The first long and elaborate sentence requires careful proclamation; the remainder of the passage is more simply expressed. It finishes on a very affirmative note for the assembly to remember and take to heart. Readers would benefit from checking out the inclusive language text in the NRSV lectionary.

Gospel

It's rare for the responsorial psalm and gospel story to parallel each other so closely. Like the seafarers in Psalm 106/107 who are terrified by a tumultuous storm but are saved when they cry out to God for help, the disciples too are delivered from disaster when they appeal to Jesus. The psalm may well have helped shape the way Mark recounts the drama.

With this episode Mark moves on from Jesus' parables to several displays of divine power. Today's scene is vividly sketched. A sudden storm, for which the Sea of Galilee is still notorious, threatens to swamp the boat; the disciples are seized by fear; Jesus remains asleep, exemplifying total trust; once awakened, he exerts his authority over the waters and rebukes the disciples; they are awe-struck.

Stormy seas epitomised chaos in the Old Testament, but Israel's God always reigned supreme. Mark is not necessarily presenting Jesus as divine in himself, but certainly as an agent of divine power. The fact that Jesus rebukes the wind and addresses the sea suggests that he is dealing with a demonic spirit. His reproach of the disciples is one of several in this gospel. Mark casts their obtuseness and lack of faith in high relief.

Because it's a familiar story, the minister of the gospel may need to take special care to ensure it is proclaimed with all its inherent vigour.

An alternative translation of the scripture readings is given here from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). This may be particularly useful for those in parishes which use the NRSV Lectionary.

TWELFTH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Job 38:1, 8-11

The Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind:

"Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

"Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?
Tell me if you have understanding.

"Who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb?—
when I made the clouds its garment,
and prescribed bounds for it,
and set bars and doors,
and said, 'Thus far shall you come, and no farther,
and here shall your proud waves be stopped'?"

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the second letter of Paul to the Corinthians 5:14-17

The love of Christ urges us on,
because we are convinced that one has died for all;
therefore all have died.

And he died for all,
so that those who live might live no longer for themselves,
but for him who died and was raised for them.

From now on, therefore, we regard no one
from a human point of view.

Even though we once knew Christ
from a human point of view,
we know him no longer in that way.

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:
everything old has passed away;
see, everything has become new!

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 4:35-41

When evening had come, Jesus said to his disciples,
"Let us go across to the other side".

And leaving the crowd behind,
they took Jesus with them in the boat, just as he was.
Other boats were with him.

A great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat,
so that the boat was already being swamped.

But Jesus was in the stern, asleep on the cushion;
and they woke him up and said to him,

"Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?"
He woke up and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea,
"Peace! Be still!"

Then the wind ceased, and there was a dead calm.
Jesus said to them, "Why are you afraid?
Have you still no faith?"
And they were filled with great awe
and said to one another,
"Who then is this,
that even the wind and the sea obey him?"

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)