

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Twentieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

18 August 2024



Collect

O God, who have prepared for those who love you
good things which no eye can see,
fill our hearts, we pray, with the warmth of your love,
so that, loving you in all things and above all things,
we may attain your promises,
which surpass every human desire.
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

“I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk 22:15). This gospel verse provides the inspiration and the Latin title, *Desiderio Desideravi*, of Pope Francis’ 2022 Apostolic Letter on the liturgy. “These words of Jesus,” Francis writes, “with which the account of the Last Supper opens, are the crevice through which we are given the surprising possibility of intuiting the depth of the love of the persons of the Most Holy Trinity for us” (#2).

He goes on: “No one had earned a place at that Supper. All had been invited. Or better said: all had been drawn there by the burning desire that Jesus had to eat that Passover with them. He knows that he is the Lamb of that Passover meal; he knows that he is the Passover. This is the absolute newness, the absolute originality, of that Supper, the only truly new thing in history, which renders that Supper unique and for this reason ‘the Last Supper,’ unrepeatable. Nonetheless, his infinite desire to re-establish that communion with us that was and remains his original design, will not be satisfied until every man and woman, from every tribe, tongue, people and nation (Rev 5:9), shall have eaten his Body and drunk his Blood. And for this reason that same Supper will be made present in the celebration of the Eucharist until he returns again.” (#4)

A reading from the book of Proverbs 9:1–6

Wisdom has built herself a house,
she has erected her seven pillars,
she has slaughtered her beasts, prepared her wine,
she has laid her table.
She has despatched her maidservants
and proclaimed from the city's heights:
'Who is ignorant? Let him step this way.'
To the fool she says,
'Come and eat my bread,
drink the wine I have prepared!
Leave your folly and you will live,
walk in the ways of perception.'

First Reading

The anchor text for the liturgy of the word is the gospel. In Ordinary Time the first reading and the psalm that complements it are chosen for their connection with the gospel. It could be argued that this reading from Proverbs is more suited to last Sunday's gospel than today's. As we shall see, the focus of Jesus' teaching has shifted from the bread of life as wisdom to the bread of life as his sacrificial body.

Nonetheless it is good to hear this appealing depiction of Lady Wisdom throwing open her house to all who wish to learn from her. A few verses further on there is a parallel passage in which Lady Folly tempts passers-by with her foolishness. Lady Wisdom has clearly prospered from her knowledge and prudence. Her house and means are substantial; she has servants at her disposal. But her wealth and status are put at the disposal of all and sundry, even the foolish, in order that they imbibe her wisdom. Dinners which provided fine fare and the opportunity for learned discourse were a feature of classical Hellenistic life. A key difference here is Wisdom's open invitation.

Mass-goers who are not familiar with the wisdom writings of the Old Testament may find this text difficult to connect with straightaway. Readers would do the assembly a service by ensuring they have gained everyone's attention before launching into the proclamation, and then by proceeding at a measured pace and with authority.

Responsorial Psalm Ps 33:2–3,10–15

R. Taste and see the goodness of the Lord.

I will bless the Lord at all times,
his praise always on my lips;
in the Lord my soul shall make its boast.
The humble shall hear and be glad. **R.**

Revere the Lord, you his saints.
They lack nothing, those who revere him.
Strong lions suffer want and go hungry
but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing. **R.**

Come, children, and hear me
that I may teach you the fear of the Lord.
Who is he who longs for life
and many days, to enjoy his prosperity? **R.**

Then keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Turn aside from evil and do good;
seek and strive after peace. **R.**

Responsorial Psalm

Today's responsorial psalm is the second of three on successive Sundays that use verses from Psalm 33/34. On all three occasions, the response – "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord" – and the first stanza are identical. The following three stanzas today come from the middle of the psalm.

As before, the first stanza is a public declaration of the psalmist's intention to praise God always. Such praise will draw in the humble and gladden their hearts. The remaining stanzas are a mix of exhortation and teaching. The psalmist is keen to declare that those who seek and fear the Lord will be blessed with long life and prosperity. There are conditions attached – they must speak the truth, do good and strive for peace.

The whole psalm is imbued with a spirit of confident trust. On the way it offers a striking image. Even though the king of beasts – the lion – is subject to want and hunger, those who put their faith in God will lack nothing. Readers are cast in the role of the psalmist, first stating their desire to praise God, then persuading the assembly to trust God and walk in God's ways. A sincere proclamation would be a good exercise of their ministry to the worshipping community.

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

5:15–20

Be very careful about the sort of lives you lead, like intelligent and not like senseless people. This may be a wicked age, but your lives should redeem it. And do not be thoughtless but recognise what is the will of the Lord. Do not drug yourselves with wine, this is simply dissipation; be filled with the Spirit. Sing the words and tunes of the psalms and hymns when you are together, and go on singing and chanting to the Lord in your hearts, so that always and everywhere you are giving thanks to God who is our Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

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

6:51–58

Jesus said to the crowd:

'I am the living bread
which has come down from heaven.
Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever;
and the bread that I shall give
is my flesh, for the life of the world.'

Then the Jews started arguing with one another: 'How can this man give us his flesh to eat?' they said. Jesus replied:

'I tell you most solemnly,
if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man
and drink his blood,
you will not have life in you.
Anyone who does eat my flesh and drink my blood
has eternal life,
and I shall raise him up on the last day.
For my flesh is real food
and my blood is real drink.
He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
lives in me
and I live in him.
As I, who am sent by the living Father,
myself draw life from the Father,
so whoever eats me will draw life from me.
This is the bread come down from heaven;
not like the bread our ancestors ate:
they are dead,
but anyone who eats this bread will live for ever.'

Second Reading

The first half of today's reading is in effect a series of do's and don'ts. Be intelligent, not senseless. Don't be wicked, redeem the age. Don't be thoughtless, be mindful of the Lord. Don't get drunk, be filled with the Spirit. The slightly shorter second half elaborates on what is meant by being intoxicated with the Spirit. It means singing chants of thankfulness when together and also within one's own heart. It means living habitually in a spirit of thanksgiving.

Once again the author presents this exhortation in a Trinitarian perspective, even if this long predates the formal theological statements hammered out at the early Church councils. It is the Spirit who ignites the giving of thanks "to God who is the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The first words of the reading – "Be very careful" – are not of themselves inspiring, nor perhaps the ensuing list of commands and prohibitions, but the author brings his advice to a cheerful conclusion. Readers should aim to lead the assembly through the toing and froing until they arrive at the joyful sound of enthusiastic song. The last words are those most easily remembered.

Gospel

In this fourth of the five readings we have from John 6, the Lord's Supper comes to the fore. The hyper-realism of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking his blood still captures our attention, though English translations moderate the Greek word for "munch" or "chew" by translating it simply as "eat."

As is well known, John's gospel carries no account of the institution of the eucharist. Instead, this language about Jesus' flesh and blood takes us back to the key assertion of the prologue – "The Word was made flesh, he lived among us" (1:14) – and on to the sacrificial death of the Son of Man on the cross. When Jesus' crucified body is pierced with a lance, John records, "there came out blood and water" (19:34).

This passage is framed by the repetition of Jesus' declaration, "Anyone who eats this bread will live for ever." At the reading's heart is the promise of indwelling. Just as Jesus dwells with the Father, so those who eat and drink of Jesus dwell in him and he in them. This is no transitory experience; it endures into eternity. At the same time, to eat Jesus' flesh and drink his blood is to be drawn into the practice of self-sacrificing love like his.

This gospel text is a series of solemn pronouncements by Jesus. The assembly deserves to hear them proclaimed with clarity and authority.

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.

TWENTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of Proverbs 9 :1-6

Wisdom has built her house,
she has hewn her seven pillars.
She has slaughtered her animals,
she has mixed her wine,
she has also set her table.
She has sent out her servant girls,
she calls from the highest places in the town,
"You that are simple, turn in here!"
To those without sense she says,
"Come, eat of my bread
and drink of the wine I have mixed.
Lay aside immaturity, and live,
and walk in the way of insight."

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter of Paul to the Ephesians 5:15-20

Brothers and sisters,
be careful how you live,
not as unwise people but as wise,
making the most of the time,
because the days are evil.
So do not be foolish,
but understand what the will of the Lord is.
Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery;
but be filled with the Spirit,
as you sing psalms and hymns
and spiritual songs among yourselves,
singing and making music to the Lord in your hearts,
giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything
in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to John 6:51-58

Jesus said to the people:
"I am the living bread that came down from heaven.
'Whoever eats of this bread will live forever;
and the bread that I will give is my flesh
for the life of the world.
The people then disputed among themselves, saying,
"How can this man give us his flesh to eat?"
So Jesus said to them,
"Very truly, I tell you,
unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood,
you have no life in you."

Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life,
and I will raise them up on the last day;
for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink.
Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me,
and I in them.
"Just as the living Father sent me,
and I live because of the Father,
so whoever eats me will live because of me.
This is the bread that came down from heaven,
not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died.
But the one who eats this bread will live forever."

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time IV)

May the God of all consolation order our days in his peace
and grant us the gifts of his blessing.

Amen.

May he free us always from every distress
and confirm our hearts in his love.

Amen.

So that on this life's journey
we may be effective in good works,
rich in the gifts of hope, faith and charity,
and may come happily to eternal life.

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 IV, Roman Missal p. 716)