

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time

Year B

27 October 2024



Collect

Almighty ever-living God,
increase our faith, hope and charity,
and make us love what you command,
so that we may merit what you promise.
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 city of Jericho is thought to be the oldest inhabited city on earth, dating back some 12,000 years. It features a number of times in the Bible. The stirring story of its conquest by Joshua, told in the book that bears his name (5:33–6:16), duly inspired the 19th century African-American spiritual “Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho.”

In the New Testament, Jericho is the setting for two significant encounters with Jesus as he travels through the city for the last time. Luke tells of Jesus engaging with Zacchaeus as he enters the city (Lk 19:1-10). Mark has Jesus cure the blind man Bartimaeus on his way out of the city. He concludes the story by saying that, as soon as Jesus cured his blindness, Bartimaeus “followed him along the road.” Most immediately, that road was the arduous way up to Jerusalem, a journey of some 25 kilometres and a climb of 1,000 metres, where Jesus was soon to meet his fate.

But “the way” came to mean something more. It signified the Christian Way. Those whom Saul set out to persecute (Acts 9:1-2) were followers of the Way. The Greek term for way – *hodos* – has become familiar again in the words “synod,” “synodal” and “synodality.” Today’s gospel story alerts us to the risk we take in walking with Jesus.

The Lord says this:

Shout with joy for Jacob!
Hail the chief of nations!
Proclaim! Praise! Shout!
'The Lord has saved his people,
the remnant of Israel!
See, I will bring them back
from the land of the North
and gather them from the far ends of earth;
all of them: the blind and the lame,
women with child, women in labour:
a great company returning here.
They had left in tears,
I will comfort them as I lead them back;
I will guide them to streams of water,
by a smooth path where they will not stumble.
For I am a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my first-born son.

Responsorial Psalm

R. The Lord has done great things for us;
we are filled with joy.

When the Lord delivered Zion from bondage,
it seemed like a dream.

Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
on our lips there were songs. **R.**

The heathens themselves said: 'What marvels
the Lord worked for them!'

What marvels the Lord worked for us!
Indeed we were glad. **R.**

Deliver us, O Lord, from our bondage
as streams in dry land.

Those who are sowing in tears
will sing when they reap. **R.**

They go out, they go out, full of tears,
carrying seed for the sowing:
they come back, they come back, full of song,
carrying their sheaves. **R.**

First Reading

The lectionary pendulum has swung wildly from one extreme to the other. Last week we read from the sombre song of the suffering servant. Today we hear one of the most exuberant texts in the three-year cycle. It's an exultant poem celebrating the return of the northern tribes to the city of Zion. The northern kingdom of Israel (or Ephraim) had been overrun by the Assyrians in the eighth century and the people scattered. The prophet Jeremiah heralds their in-gathering.

Drawn into this new exodus will be the weak and vulnerable, the sorrowful and the unsteady – all those most in need. The poem finishes with one of the several references to God as father that may be found in the Old Testament. The fatherhood of God is not a New Testament invention, though it does take on a wealth of new meaning. There's a case to be made for retaining the description of Ephraim as "my first-born son." It means that the privileges of the first-born son in this ancient patriarchal society were accorded to the people as a whole.

If readers do justice to the opening lines of the text, there's every chance they will startle the assembly, and rightly so. The excitement level recedes somewhat after that as the message becomes an extended promise of restoration and revival. The encouragement and comfort culminate in God's assurance of fatherly care. Readers will need to modulate their tone as they progress through the poem.

Ps 125

Responsorial Psalm

As was noted a few Sundays ago, Psalms 119/120 – 133/134 all bear the title "a song of ascents." They may have been prayed either by pilgrims making their way up to the Temple in Jerusalem or by exiles departing Babylon for the journey home. With one exception they are quite short. The whole of Psalm 125/126 serves as the responsorial psalm today and the response is sourced from within it.

The prayer is bitter-sweet. It seems to relate to the Babylonian homecoming rather than the return announced by Jeremiah, but the sentiments are the same. The new exodus has been successfully accomplished, much to the Israelites' joy and the pagan nations' astonishment. But this exultation has drained away. It seems that the task of rebuilding is overwhelming them. They feel as though they are in bondage again. They dream of the desert being watered by streams, of unpromising land producing a rich harvest, of tears being turned to songs of joy. Memory and hope are threaded through the psalm. The response itself echoes this partnership. Recalling that "The Lord has done great things for us" prompts the assertion "we are filled with joy." This joy is a launching pad for hope. Readers will need to end the first part of the response with an upward inflection so as to cue the assembly to wait for the remainder. They must resist the temptation to run the short lines of the psalm together and deprive them of their poetic energy.

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 5:1–6

Every high priest has been taken out of mankind and is appointed to act for men in their relations with God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins; and so he can sympathise with those who are ignorant or uncertain because he too lives in the limitations of weakness. That is why he has to make sin offerings for himself as well as for the people. No one takes this honour on himself, but each one is called by God, as Aaron was. Nor did Christ give himself the glory of becoming high priest, but he had it from the one who said to him: You are my son, today I have become your father, and in another text: You are a priest of the order of Melchizedek, and for ever.

Second Reading

In this last of three successive passages from Hebrews, the author wants to establish that Christ was called by God to be priest. To be a priest, he writes, one must be fully human and also appointed by God. The priest's humanity enables him to identify with and represent human beings in their weakness. Divine appointment gives him authority before God. Jesus' call is attested by the quotation from Psalm 109/110.

The role of the high priest was actually much more than making sin offerings, but the author homes in on the annual Day of Atonement rite. Every year the high priest entered the Holy of Holies and sprinkled the blood of a sacrificed bull to make atonement for his own sins and those of the people. This ritual is only hinted at here. The author deals with it at length in chapters 9-10.

Having affirmed Jesus' humanity in last week's reading, the author is now concerned to argue that Jesus did not claim the honour of being priest for himself. It was bestowed on him by God. In that respect he is like Aaron (though after Aaron the priesthood became hereditary). Jesus is also likened to the mysterious priest-king Melchizedek, a significant figure in Jewish thought around the time of Jesus and the subject of extended discussion in chapter 7.

Given its rhetorical style and Jewish mode of thought, this reading will take some preparation. Readers will need to guide the assembly through it step by step, with a steady and sure proclamation. The NRSV lectionary retains exclusive language in one place, and changes it in another. The remarkable verses that follow (5:7-9) are worth checking out. They're read on the 5th Sunday of Lent in Year B.

A reading from the holy Gospel according to Mark

10:46–52

As Jesus left Jericho with his disciples and a large crowd, Bartimaeus (that is, the son of Timaeus), a blind beggar, was sitting at the side of the road. When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout and to say, 'Son of David, Jesus, have pity on me.' And many of them scolded him and told him to keep quiet, but he only shouted all the louder, 'Son of David, have pity on me.' Jesus stopped and said, 'Call him here.' So they called the blind man. 'Courage,' they said 'get up; he is calling you.' So throwing off his cloak, he jumped up and went to Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, 'What do you want me to do for you?' 'Rabbuni,' the blind man said to him 'Master, let me see again.' Jesus said to him, 'Go; your faith has saved you.' And immediately his sight returned and he followed him along the road.

Gospel

It's illuminating to compare the story of Bartimaeus' cure with that of another blind man earlier in the gospel (8:22-26), a story passed over by the lectionary. The previous cure takes place in Galilee; the man is relatively passive, being brought by others; Jesus uses spittle and touch to cure him; the man's sight returns only in stages; and he seems to comply with Jesus' directive to go home. Bartimaeus, on the other hand, is cured on the outskirts of Jericho, near Jerusalem; he actively takes the initiative and presses his claim, showing that he is already a believer; he freely abandons the security of his cloak. In response Jesus employs no physical action but simply declares the man cured because of his faith. Bartimaeus, for his part, instead of going away as directed, follows Jesus "along the road."

In sum, Bartimaeus is presented as a dynamic disciple. His acclamation of Jesus as Son of David is exceptional in Mark's gospel. His inner sight (his faith) has won him his outer sight. He follows Jesus on the long climb up to Jerusalem where the crowd will hail Jesus for the coming of David's kingdom. After Bartimaeus there is no other profession of faith until the centurion on Calvary declares Jesus to have been a son of God. Jesus' chosen disciples fail to match Bartimaeus.

This episode concludes Mark's account of Jesus' ministry outside Jerusalem. The die is now cast. Jesus' passion predictions are about to be fulfilled. Mark tells this story with energy and colour, and that is how it deserves to be delivered.

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.

THIRTIETH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME

FIRST READING (NRSV)

A reading from the book of the prophet Jeremiah 31:7–9

Thus says the Lord:

"Sing aloud with gladness for Jacob,
and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;
proclaim, give praise, and say,
'Save, O Lord, your people,
the remnant of Israel.'

"See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north,
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,
among them those who are blind and those who are lame,
those with child and those in labour; together;
a great company, they shall return here.

"With weeping they shall come,
and with consolations I will lead them back,
I will let them walk by brooks of water;
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;
for I have become a father to Israel,
and Ephraim is my firstborn."

SECOND READING (NRSV)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews 5:1–6

Every high priest chosen from among mortals
is put in charge of things pertaining to God on their behalf,
to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins.

He is able to deal gently with the ignorant and wayward,
since he himself is subject to weakness;
and because of this he must offer sacrifice for his own sins
as well as for those of the people.

And one does not presume to take this honour;
but takes it only when called by God, just as Aaron was.

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest,
but was appointed by the one who said to him,

"You are my Son,
today I have begotten you";
as he says also in another place,
"You are a priest forever;
according to the order of Melchizedek."

GOSPEL (NRSV)

A reading from the holy gospel according to Mark 10:46–52

As Jesus and his disciples and a large crowd were leaving Jericho,
Bartimaeus son of Timaeus, a blind beggar,
was sitting by the roadside.

When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth,
he began to shout out and say,

"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!"

Many sternly ordered him to be quiet,
but he cried out even more loudly,
"Son of David, have mercy on me!"
Jesus stood still and said,
"Call him here."
And they called the blind man, saying to him,
"Take heart; get up, he is calling you."
So throwing off his cloak, he sprang up and came to Jesus.
Then Jesus said to him,
"What do you want me to do for you?"
The blind man said to him,
"My teacher; let me see again."
Jesus said to him,
"Go; your faith has made you well."
Immediately the man regained his sight
and followed Jesus on the way.

Concluding Prayer

Solemn Blessing (Ordinary Time III)

May almighty God bless us in his kindness
and pour out saving wisdom upon us.

Amen.

May he nourish us always with the teachings of the faith
and make us persevere in holy deeds.

Amen.

May he turn our steps towards himself
and show us the path of charity and peace.

Amen.

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 III, Roman Missal p. 715)