

# SUNDAY READINGS

## READ AT HOME

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Easter

Year B

18 April 2021



### Collect

May your people exult for ever, O God,  
in renewed youthfulness of spirit,  
so that, rejoicing now in the restored glory of our adoption,  
we may look forward in confident hope  
to the rejoicing of the day of resurrection.  
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

Our chief guide through the Easter season is the gospel-writer John, but first we pause to hear Luke's sequel to his story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. This further appearance of the crucified and risen One opens up a new and limitless horizon for the followers of Jesus; they are to bear witness to him by preaching "repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . to all the nations".

Pope Francis extended this missionary mandate to all of us: "Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelisation; indeed, anyone who has truly experienced God's saving love does not need much time or lengthy training to go out and proclaim that love. Every Christian is a missionary to the extent that he or she has encountered the love of God in Christ Jesus: we no longer say that we are 'disciples' and 'missionaries', but rather that we are always 'missionary disciples' (*The Joy of the Gospel* #120). He throws down the gauntlet to us: "So what are we waiting for?"

## A reading from the Acts of the Apostles

3:13–15, 17–19

Peter said to the people 'You are Israelites, and it is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, who has glorified his servant Jesus, the same Jesus you handed over and then disowned in the presence of Pilate, after Pilate had decided to release him. It was you who accused the Holy One, the Just One, you who demanded the reprieve of a murderer while you killed the prince of life. God, however, raised him from the dead, and to that fact we are the witnesses.

'Now I know, brothers, that neither you nor your leaders had any idea what you were really doing; this was the way God carried out what he had foretold, when he said through all his prophets that his Christ would suffer. Now you must repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out.'

## Responsorial Psalm

Ps 4:2, 4, 7, 9

R. Lord, let your face shine on us.

or

R. Alleluia.

When I call, answer me, O God of justice;  
from anguish you released me, have mercy and  
hear me! R.

It is the Lord who grants favours to those whom he  
loves;  
the Lord hears me whenever I call him. R.

'What can bring us happiness?' many say.  
Lift up the light of your face on us, O Lord. R.

I will lie down in peace and sleep comes at once,  
for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety. R.

## First Reading

The event that lies behind today's and next Sunday's first reading is described in Acts 3:1-10; it's well worth the reader's time to check it out (note that the reference to the healing in verse 16 is omitted from the reading). The apostle Peter, accompanied by John, calls on "the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth" to heal a man crippled from birth. To their astonishment the crowd sees the man "walking and leaping and praising God". Their reaction provides the occasion for Luke to construct a second sermon for Peter on the place of Jesus in Israel's history.

We hear only part of this speech, but enough to catch its polemical tone. Peter plainly accuses his listeners of responsibility for Jesus' death while affirming that their actions served to fulfil God's providential plan. Readers and listeners alike need to be aware that Luke's overall aim is to account for the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles; in the process the Jewish community, especially its leaders, is portrayed in a negative light for their refusal to believe in Jesus.

Today's passage gives both sides of the argument. Peter puts the responsibility for Jesus' trial and execution on to his listeners before excusing them on the grounds of ignorance. All the same they are called to repent of their sins. Readers need to take care with their proclamation so as not to overplay the accusation that Peter makes against the Jewish people lest it stir up anti-Semitic sentiment.

As a whole the text is a resounding affirmation of divine purpose; even the worst we do as human beings cannot gainsay God's loving plan. The call to repentance is addressed to us all. These are the lessons for readers to convey to the congregation by a strong and thoughtful proclamation.

## Responsorial Psalm

This is the only time in the three-year cycle that we draw on Psalm 4. It is a short prayer for help and deliverance from one who is in trouble. It is partly addressed to God, and partly to the psalmist's enemies, though this is not obvious from today's selection of verses.

The response is adapted from a verse of the psalm. It is a lovely prayer which echoes the central petition in Aaron's blessing (Numbers 6:24-26) that is now one of the options for a Solemn Blessing at the end of Mass. Readers and congregation alike may make the response their own heartfelt prayer.

The verses blend together earnest cries for help with expressions of trusting faith. Readers should be sure to convey these sentiments convincingly. The verses are unusual in form, each being of two relatively long lines rather than the more common and shorter four. This means that readers will need to take care to give the congregation clear vocal and visual cues for each response.

## A reading from the first letter of St John

2:1–5

I am writing this, my children,  
to stop you sinning;  
but if anyone should sin,  
we have our advocate with the Father,  
Jesus Christ, who is just;  
he is the sacrifice that takes our sins away,  
and not only ours,  
but the whole world's.  
We can be sure that we know God  
only by keeping his commandments.  
Anyone who says, 'I know him',  
and does not keep his commandments,  
is a liar,  
refusing to admit the truth.  
But when anyone does obey what he has said,  
God's love comes to perfection in him.

## A reading from the holy Gospel according to Luke

24:35–48

The disciples told their story of what had happened on the road and how they had recognised Jesus at the breaking of bread.

They were still talking about this when Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you!' In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost. But he said, 'Why are you so agitated, and why are these doubts rising in your hearts? Look at my hands and feet; yes, it is I indeed. Touch me and see for yourselves; a ghost has no flesh and bones as you can see I have.' And as he said this he showed them his hands and feet. Their joy was so great that they could not believe it, and they stood dumbfounded; so he said to them, 'Have you anything here to eat?' And they offered him a piece of grilled fish, which he took and ate before their eyes.

Then he told them, 'This is what I meant when I said, while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, in the Prophets and in the Psalms, has to be fulfilled.' He then opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, 'So you see how it is written that the Christ would suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that, in his name, repentance for the forgiveness of sins would be preached to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses to this.'

## Second Reading

After last week's passage from the final chapter of 1 John we begin a series from earlier chapters, starting today with Chapter 2. In keeping with the character of the whole letter, today's short text isn't tightly organised into a systematic argument. It proceeds via a loosely connected series of statements and contrasts: sinners and the just one, liars and lovers, obedience and disobedience.

Readers will need to approach this text carefully, allowing each part its own weight. A short pause after each one will allow the congregation to enter into the reflective quality of the reading. It should not be read through quickly as if it each sentence led to the next with strict logic.

The reading begins with a declaration that should catch everyone's attention: "I am writing this, my children, to stop you sinning". If there is an implicit accusation in this, it is immediately put into perspective by the teaching that follows. Jesus takes away not just our sins but those of the whole world, and remains our advocate with the Father.

Another accusation appears later, that those who claim to know God but do not keep his commandments are liars. This too is more than counter-balanced by the following affirmation, that God's love comes to perfection in those who obey God's word. Readers have the task of leading the congregation all the way from the opening admonition through to its rousing conclusion.

## Gospel

Apart from passing reference to an appearance to Simon Peter (24:34), Luke records only two appearances of the risen Jesus, the first to the disciples at Emmaus, the second to the whole group back in Jerusalem. In a sense they are so closely linked as to form but one appearance that serves to link Jesus' resurrection with the final episode of the gospel, his ascension.

After the opening verse connecting today's story with that of Emmaus, the gospel falls into two parts. The first establishes the reality of the resurrection by emphasising the physical in terms that are reminiscent of John's gospel. As he does for Thomas (John 20:24-29), Jesus shows the disciples his hands and feet; and as he cooks fish for the disciples by the sea of Galilee (John 21:9-14), so he eats fish before them in Jerusalem.

In the second part Jesus repeats what he did for the disciples on the way to Emmaus. He recalls and reinterprets the scriptures for them, not only so that they can come to grips with what has already happened – his death and resurrection – but be prepared for the future. They are to preach "repentance for the forgiveness of sins . . . to all the nations". In one short declaration – "You are witnesses to this" – Luke paves the way for his companion volume, the Acts, to tell the story of the mission to the nations.

## **Blessing for Easter**

May God, who by the Resurrection of his Only Begotten Son  
was pleased to confer on us  
the gift of redemption and of adoption,  
give us gladness by his blessing.

**Amen.**

May he, by whose redeeming work  
we have received the gift of everlasting freedom,  
make us heirs to an eternal inheritance.

**Amen.**

And may we, who have already risen with Christ  
in Baptism through faith,  
by living in a right manner on this earth,  
be united with him in the homeland 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 Easter Time, Roman Missal p 712.)