

SUNDAY READINGS

READ AT HOME

Pentecost Sunday
31 May 2020



Collect

O God, who by the mystery of today's great feast sanctify your whole Church in every people and nation, pour out, we pray, the gifts of the Holy Spirit across the face of the earth and, with the divine grace that was at work when the Gospel was first proclaimed, fill now once more the hearts of believers. 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 feast of Pentecost brings the season of Easter to a glorious close. Though we hear Luke telling us today that the Spirit was bestowed fifty days after the resurrection, we know that we've already spent the entire Easter season "in the Spirit". The reason for this is made clear by the gospel reading. In John's version of events, Jesus breathed out his Spirit on the disciples on the very day of his resurrection, "the first day of the week". Each writer has a theological perspective that accounts for his particular chronology.

We have not spent the past seven weeks waiting for the Spirit. The feast of Pentecost allows us to cry a final full-hearted "Alleluia!" for all the Spirit has accomplished in us and will continue to do. We pray with fresh fervour the same response to the psalm that followed the story of creation at the Easter Vigil fifty days ago: "Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth".

A reading from the Acts of the Apostles 2:1–11

When Pentecost day came round, the apostles had all met in one room, when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven, and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished. 'Surely' they said 'all these men speaking are Galileans? How does it happen that each of us hears them in his own native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; people from Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya round Cyrene; as well as visitors from Rome – Jews and proselytes alike – Cretans and Arabs; we hear them preaching in our own language about the marvels of God.'

Responsorial Psalm Ps 103:1, 24, 29–31, 34

R. Lord, send out your Spirit
and renew the face of the earth.

or

R. Alleluia.

Bless the Lord, my soul!
Lord God, how great you are,
How many are your works, O Lord!
The earth is full of your riches. **R.**

You take back your spirit, they die,
returning to the dust from which they came.
You send forth your spirit, they are created;
and you renew the face of the earth. **R.**

May the glory of the Lord last for ever!
May the Lord rejoice in his works!
May my thoughts be pleasing to him.
I find my joy in the Lord. **R.**

First Reading

The first phrase of the reading – “When Pentecost day came round” – alerts us to the fact that Pentecost was not a Christian invention. It had long been a Jewish observance. As stated earlier, it was an autumn harvest festival that became a commemoration of the revelation of God on Mount Sinai, along with the giving of the Torah and the making of the covenant.

Christians have overlaid this remembrance with their own meanings. Because of the account that we now hear from the Acts of the Apostles, Christians celebrate Pentecost in memory of the outpouring of the Spirit and the launch of the Church's mission to broadcast good news to the world.

Jewish tradition is not swept away however. The story as we have it cannot be understood apart from the stories of the Old Testament. These tell of God's continuing self-communication – in the act of creation, in God's response to the tower of Babel, in the making of the covenant, in the preaching of the prophets. All these lie behind this episode from the Acts.

The drama of the event is well captured in the text. There is no mistaking the divine energy at play. Readers who are attuned to this will have no difficulty maintaining the assembly's attention. The biggest challenge is with the pronunciation of the proper names. It is essential that readers check the guide to make sure they have the correct pronunciation. Then they will need to rehearse the whole list until they are confident they can proclaim the reading without hesitation. Only then will they be able to communicate the excitement of the occasion.

Responsorial Psalm

The psalm for today is the same as that for the vigil, except with the omission of two verses and the addition of one other. Much of the earlier commentary is repeated here.

The response to the psalm – “Lord, send out your Spirit and renew the face of the earth” – is a confident prayer taken from the body of the psalm. It is set out in two lines. The reader needs to insert a momentary pause between them but without prompting the congregation to respond prematurely. A slightly upward inflexion on “Spirit” and a glance at the congregation after “earth” should achieve this.

Psalm 103/104 is a glad song in praise of God as Creator and Sustainer of all things, chosen no doubt for its reference to the spirit which creates and renews all things. It rejoices in the splendour of creation, focussing on its harmony and good order. It chooses to be silent about nature's harsher features. The reader should be able to proclaim this exuberant psalm with ease.

**A reading from the letter of St Paul
to the Corinthians 12:3–7, 12–13**

No one can say, 'Jesus is Lord' unless he is under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

There is a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit; there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same Lord; working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God who is working in all of them. The particular way in which the Spirit is given to each person is for a good purpose.

Just as a human body, though it is made up of many parts, is a single unit because all these parts, though many, make one body, so it is with Christ. In the one Spirit we were all baptised, Jews as well as Greeks, slaves as well as citizens, and one Spirit was given to us all to drink.

**A reading from the holy Gospel according to John
20:19–23**

In the evening of the first day of the week, the doors were closed in the room where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews. Jesus came and stood among them. He said to them, 'Peace be with you,' and showed them his hands and his side. The disciples were filled with joy when they saw the Lord, and he said to them again, 'Peace be with you.'

'As the Father sent me,
so am I sending you.'

After saying this he breathed on them and said:

'Receive the Holy Spirit.
For those whose sins you forgive,
they are forgiven;
for those whose sins you retain, they are retained.'

Second Reading

The Christian community at Corinth was blessed with many gifts of the Spirit, indeed with an excess of gifts according to Paul. One of the goals of his first letter to the Corinthians is to rein in their enthusiasm. Paul feels the need to insist that the many and varied gifts enjoyed by the community are given for one purpose – to build up the body of Christ. As usual he does not present a carefully ordered methodical argument. The transitions between the three parts of the reading are more by way of association. Readers would be well advised to take up their Bibles and read the whole of chapter 12. They will see that the first sentence of the reading is an assertion that relates to what has gone before. Here it has been detached from its context. In the second part of the text, Paul maintains that in the diversity of gifts only one Spirit is at work, and only one Lord is served. In the third and final part he changes tack. He now wants to insist on the unity of the body of Christ, using the analogy of the human body. We read only the beginning of his exposition; he expands on the idea in the rest of the chapter. Readers should therefore not run each of these three parts of the reading into one another. They should allow each one to speak for itself. But the combined effect should prompt joy and gratitude for the work of the Spirit in our midst.

Gospel

The gospel for today consists in the first part of the gospel that we heard on the Second Sunday of Easter. This shorter passage describes the appearance of the risen Lord to the assembled disciples on the first Easter Day. As already noted, in contrast to the account in Luke's gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, John presents Jesus' resurrection, his giving the Spirit and the commissioning of the disciples in a single unified sequence. This momentous ensemble of events is conveyed in just a few short verses; they must not be hurried through. The text falls into two parts. First, Jesus appears to the fear-filled disciples and greets them with peace, not just once but twice. This twofold greeting should be given strong emphasis. There is no reproach from Jesus, no word of condemnation for the disciples' capitulation to their fear. There is only the double greeting of peace, followed by a reassuring demonstration that he is indeed the crucified and risen One. Second, Jesus commissions the disciples and breathes out his Spirit upon them. As they themselves have been forgiven, so are they sent out as missionaries of mercy. This deceptively brief text serves to bring the Easter season to a close on a wonderfully affirmative note.

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.)