
'IN THE SCRIPTURES,
BY THE SPIRIT,
MAY WE SEE THE SAVIOURS FACE,
HEAR HIS WORD AND
HEED HIS CALLING,
KNOW HIS LOVE AND
GROW IN GRACE.'

Readings: <https://www.catholicbishops.ie/readings/?feature=sunday>

The link to the readings is a temporary one, it will bring you to the correct readings only for the week leading up to the Sunday in question. (its a copyright thing)

Notes: <https://www.tarsus.ie/resources/PDF-2020/A20-Lent-3.pdf>

The Gospel

John 4:5-42

This Sunday's Gospel is the story of the Woman at the Well. On the third attempt, Jesus finally gets through to her but after that there is no stopping her. As Augustine teaches, she represents us: what do I thirst for? What is the most important thing in my life? Where do I now find God? By relentless challenge and resolute honesty, we too can be led to that encounter with Jesus, which changes everything, "giving life a new horizon and a decisive direction." May we come to believe because we have heard him ourselves and we know that he really is the saviour of the world.

First Reading,

Exodus 17:3-7

Today's gospel, John 4:5-42, is Jesus' teaching about himself as the source of Living Water. So the first reading is about a time when God's people literally thirsted and God satisfied them.

The Israelites had only recently been slaves, for several generations, in Egypt, and for the most part had forgotten their ancestral religion. Then this upstart Moses tells them that their ancient Lord has at last heard their cries, and is now leading their escape from Egypt back to their homeland. But this generation does not yet know the Lord. Oh, they've seen some mighty deeds, but they remember that in Egypt they at least were not thirsty.

Proclaiming It: When you relate the people's opening complaint, make them sound petulant. Then make Moses sound scared.

Help your listeners form a clear mental image of what Moses is asked to do. Go before the mob, God tells him, "holding in your hand, as you go, the staff ... I will be standing there [invisible, even to you]... Strike the rock, and water will flow from it for the people to drink." When the Lord says "Strike the rock," your listeners should hear the "thwack" of oak on stone. Then pause.

The next sentence is quite matter of fact. "This Moses did, in the presence of the elders of Israel." The author doesn't even feel compelled to report whether or not "it worked," so great is his faith (in hindsight). You should say the sentence just that way.

Second Reading

Romans 5:1-2, 5-8

The first sentence raises some questions:

- What does "justified" mean?
- What is the "faith" that gets us justified?
- Why is faith the only right way? Are there no others?

In this context, "justified" means having justice, which is to say having a right relationship with God, and so enjoying God's favor. (To help English-speaking people avoid confusing this with the legal justice so important to us, some scholars translate the Greek noun as righteousness, and the adjective as "rightwised." It's a bit awkward, but it helps you get the meaning correctly.) Saint Paul realized that he and all Jews who tried to keep the law of Moses were trying to become justified, but keeping the law wasn't an adequate method. What absolutely does not bring us justice is our own working at it. When in this reading Paul says "while we were still helpless," he's referring to our impotence before God, our inability to make ourselves worthy of God's favor, whether by good works, keeping the commandments, rituals or prayers.

Faith, then, is the admission that one cannot justify oneself, with the confident belief that God will grant us justice anyway. As Paul shows in the last sentence of today's passage, the death of Christ, for people not self-justified, proves that.

Paul calls our situation "this grace in which we stand." By "grace" he does not mean that metaphorical money in one's spiritual bank, or charge in one's spiritual battery, which some seem to mean when they throw around the term "grace." Rather, grace here means the gratuitous, unearned, undeserved character of God's approval of us. (The words gratuitous and grace have the same root in our language.)

Proclaiming it: These are subtle points, and your listeners won't get them without help from the preacher. But the lector who understands them can give his or her proclamation a proper Lenten emphasis. That demands special emphasis on the last few sentences, beginning "For Christ, while we were still helpless, ..." With contrasting tones of voice, describe the Lord's great self-gift and the abject unworthiness of us sinners whom he loves.