

PENTECOST SUNDAY: VIGIL

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihs

A reading of a story absorbed in mysterious power. As much a parable as it is a demonstration of the incomprehensible mind of God, it can seem almost like science fiction. It's probably best to treat it that way in terms of proclaiming it: Read what's in the text, straightforwardly and clearly.

Shinar = SHĭ-nahr

The two repetitions of "Come" stand for the aspirations—or arrogance—of the people.

Give a little edge to the word when you speak it.

bitumen = bih-TYOO-m*n

God's use of "let us" repeats the use of the builders of the tower. Here, God's intention is unhelpful, destructive even. "Confuse" is the loaded word.

There are options for today's readings. Contact your parish staff to learn which readings will be used.

READING I The first eleven chapters of Genesis contain the primal history of the world's creation and its need for salvation. While the world is deemed "good" by God, with all things manifesting perfect order and complementarity, and with humanity made in God's image, sin quickly enters the world through the human desire to possess the knowledge that belongs to God alone (Genesis 1-3).

LECTIONARY #62

READING I Genesis 11:1-9

A reading from the Book of Genesis

The whole **world** spoke the same **language**, using the same **words**.

While the **people** were migrating in the east, they came upon a **valley** in the land of **Shinar** and settled there.

They said to one another,
"**Come**, let us mold **bricks** and harden them with **fire**."

They used **bricks** for stone, and **bitumen** for mortar.

Then they said, "**Come**, let us **build** ourselves a **city** and a **tower** with its **top** in the **sky**, and so make a **name** for ourselves; otherwise we shall be **scattered** all over the **earth**."

The **LORD** came down to see the **city** and the **tower** that the **people** had built.

Then the **LORD** said: "If **now**, while they are one **people**, all **speaking** the same **language**, they have **started** to do this, **nothing** will later stop them from doing **whatever** they **presume** to do.

Let us then go **down** there and **confuse** their language, so that **one** will not **understand** what another **says**."

Thus the **LORD** **scattered** them from **there** all over the **earth**, and they **stopped** building the city.

God's frustration with humanity comes to a highpoint in Genesis in the story of Noah, when God decides to destroy creation with a flood but then relents and establishes a new order of creation with Noah in the giving of a covenant that renews the face of the earth (Genesis 6:5-9:17). However, as the descendants of Noah begin to repopulate the earth, with everyone speaking the same language, the story unfolds in yet another rupture in the relationship with God. Once again, humanity forgets the providence of God and chooses to strive to become as great as God.

The story of the tower of Babel opens with the image that the whole world is united by the ability to communicate without difficulty. Nevertheless, the unity experienced by the human family is cause for the development of a fear. They come to believe that they must make a great name for themselves, or they will become separated from one another. Thus, they decide to build a tower that rises high into the sky in order to demonstrate their greatness on the face of the earth and to preserve their unity.

However, the Lord comes down to earth to observe what the people are doing

Babel = BAB-**l*

Note the repetition of "confuse" in "confused." The word suggests something of the power of God.

For meditation and context:

Exodus = EK-suh-duhs

A reading of the sealing of the covenant between God and humankind, attended by powerful natural phenomena. The scene of this reading is especially vivid.

"Therefore" initiates the terms of the covenant. Say it with authority.

That is why it was called **Babel**,
because **there** the LORD **confused** the speech of **all** the world.
It was from **that** place that he **scattered** them all over the **earth**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 33:10–11, 12–13, 14–15

R. Blessed the people the Lord has chosen to be his own.

The LORD brings to nought the plans
of nations;
he foils the designs of peoples.
But the plan of the LORD stands forever;
the design of his heart, through
all generations.

Blessed the nation whose God is the LORD,
the people he has chosen for his own
inheritance.

From heaven the LORD looks down;
he sees all mankind.

From his fixed throne he beholds
all who dwell on the earth,
He who fashioned the heart of each,
he who knows all their works.

READING II Exodus 19:3–8a, 16–20b

A reading from the Book of Exodus

Moses went up the **mountain** to God.

Then the LORD **called** him and said,

"**Thus** shall you say to the house of **Jacob**;
tell the **Israelites**:

You have **seen** for yourselves how I **treated** the Egyptians
and how I **bore** you up on **eagle wings**
and **brought** you here to **myself**.

Therefore, if you **hearken** to my voice and **keep** my covenant,
you shall be my **special** possession,
dearer to me than **all** other people,
though **all** the earth is **mine**.

You shall be to me a **kingdom** of priests, a **holy** nation.

That is what you must **tell** the Israelites."

So **Moses** went and summoned the **elders** of the people.

When he set **before** them

all that the LORD had **ordered** him to tell them, >>

in the construction of a tower. The people have abused their gift of unity and are moving along a path where they become so grandiose in their self-assessment that they will feel they no longer need God. Thus, God's punishment is to inflict upon the people precisely what they feared from the outset: they will forever be "scattered," separated from one another "all over the earth." The primeval account of creation thus ends with an explanation as to why there is a diversity of languages in the world that causes communication to be difficult. Confusion of speech thereby prevents

the human family from pursuing the destructive path of trying to be God's equal.

READING II This passage from the Book of Exodus is in two parts. The first half of the passage details the Lord's choice of Israel as his own possession and the promise of the covenant. The second portion focuses on the great theophany at Mount Sinai, when God makes the mountain come alive with his awesome presence. First God speaks, and then God manifests his power using the tangible means of natural wonders.

At the beginning of this passage we witness Moses climbing the mountain in order to meet privately with God. This takes place three months after the Israelites began their journey of freedom out of Egypt. The Lord calls Moses and commands him to speak to the Israelites, reminding them of God's action in their exodus from Egypt. It was God alone who carried them out of Egypt as if borne on "eagle wings." Furthermore, God tells Moses that this newfound freedom comes with an important responsibility. The people are to respond to God's voice, keep his covenant,

“Everything the Lord has said, we will do”:
With these words, the covenant is sealed.
Emphasis on “do.”

Natural forces express themselves vividly
in response.

Even stresses on the words in this line.

The vision of smoke and fire signals the
power of God. These words paint a potent
picture. No need, however, to raise your
voice. Keep it steady.

TO KEEP IN MIND

The responsorial psalm “has great
liturgical and pastoral importance,
since it fosters meditation on the
Word of God,” the *General Instruc-
tion on the Roman Missal* says. Pray
it as you prepare.

the people all answered together,
“**Everything** the Lord has said, we will do.”

On the **morning** of the third day
there were **peals** of thunder and lightning,
and a heavy **cloud** over the mountain,
and a very loud trumpet blast,
so that all the **people** in the camp **trembled**.
But **Moses** led the people **out** of the camp to meet **God**,
and they **stationed** themselves at the foot of the **mountain**.
Mount **Sinai** was all wrapped in **smoke**,
for the **LORD** came down **upon** it in **fire**.
The smoke **rose** from it as though from a **furnace**,
and the whole **mountain** trembled **violently**.
The trumpet blast grew **louder** and **louder**, while Moses
was speaking,
and God **answering** him with **thunder**.
When the **LORD** came **down** to the top of Mount **Sinai**,
he summoned **Moses** to the top of the **mountain**.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Daniel 3:52, 53, 54, 55, 56

R. Glory and praise for ever!

“Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of
our fathers,
praiseworthy and exalted above
all forever;
and blessed is your holy and glorious name,
praiseworthy and exalted above all for
all ages.”

“Blessed are you in the temple of your
holy glory,
praiseworthy and glorious above
all forever.”

“Blessed are you on the throne of
your Kingdom,
praiseworthy and exalted above
all forever.”

“Blessed are you who look into the depths
from your throne upon the cherubim,
praiseworthy and exalted above
all forever.”

“Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven,
praiseworthy and glorious forever.”

Or:

and display before all the world what it
means to be his “special possession.” Israel
is to take on a priestly identity, suggesting
that they are set apart from every other
nation. Their holiness is to be a sign of
God’s power and fidelity, and as the Book
of Exodus will show, of God’s great mercy.
When Moses speaks to the people, repre-
sented by a group of leaders, the people
answer in unison that they will do all that
the Lord has commanded.

Verses 9 through 15 of this chapter,
which are omitted in our hearing of Exodus
today, contains the preparations the

Israelites make to ready themselves for
God’s formal giving of the law. The people
are to ritually purify themselves and are
told not to go anywhere near God’s holy
mountain. With these preparations, the
Israelites are made ready to behold the
fearsome wonder of God. Thus we hear
the second portion of this reading, the
theophany at Sinai. With thunder and light-
ning, dense clouds and the sounding of the
trumpet, the people tremble as God makes
himself known. As they look on, Moses and
God carry on an intense conversation,
which is made visibly present in fire and

smoke, trumpet and thunder. Made ready
for the deepening of his personal encoun-
ter with God, Moses leaves the people and
ascends the mountain, where he will
receive instruction on the covenant from
the mouth of God. This magnificent theoph-
any reveals in a very physical way that
God’s power and might is beyond compare.
Yet God will later come to demonstrate
that his greatest strength of all is the ability
to show mercy and compassion to his sin-
ful people (for example, Exodus 34:6–7).

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 19:8, 9, 10, 11

R. Lord, you have the words of everlasting life.

The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul;

The decree of the LORD is trustworthy,
giving wisdom to the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right,
rejoicing the heart;

The command of the LORD is clear,
enlightening the eye.

The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever;

The ordinances of the LORD are true,
all of them just.

They are more precious than gold,
than a heap of purest gold;

Sweeter also than syrup
or honey from the comb.

READING III Ezekiel 37:1-14

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel

The **hand** of the LORD came **upon** me,
and he led me **out** in the **spirit** of the LORD
and set me in the **center** of the **plain**,
which was now **filled** with **bones**.

He made me **walk** among the **bones** in every **direction**
so that I saw how **many** they were on the **surface** of the plain.

How **dry** they were!

He asked me:

Son of **man**, can these **bones** come to **life**?

I answered, "Lord **GOD**, you **alone** know that."

Then he said to me:

Prophecy over these **bones**, and say to them:

Dry bones, **hear** the **word** of the LORD!

Thus says the Lord **GOD** to these **bones**:

See! I will bring spirit into you, that you may come to **life**.

I will put **sinews** upon you, make flesh grow **over** you,

cover you with **skin**, and put spirit **in** you

so that you may come to **life** and **know** that I am the LORD. >>

Ezekiel = ee-ZEE-kee-uhl

A reading with visionary passages of exquisite strangeness and power. God speaks to and through Ezekiel throughout this reading. Because the punctuation isn't entirely clear, it's useful to have markers for yourself for when God is speaking and when Ezekiel is speaking for himself. Also, this reading makes use of the verb "prophesy" as well as its past tense, "prophesied." Pronunciation is important. Prophesy = PROF-uh-sī (not PROF-uh-see); Prophesied = PROF-uh-sīd (not PROF-uh-seed). Be sure to practice

God begins to speak here.

The vision, which is frightening, begins here with the valley of dry bones. The life of this vision relies on these dry bones coming to life.

sinews = sin-yooz

Emphasis on "know."

READING III

The context for Ezekiel's prophecy is the utter desolation of Israel. The Temple in Jerusalem has been leveled, the people have been banished to the land of Babylon, and the entire nation begins to doubt that God no longer wishes to be in relationship with them anymore. The Israelites had to ask themselves this basic question: how can we consider ourselves to be God's chosen people when our life situation only speaks of doom and gloom, despair and death?

Ezekiel uses this bleak outlook to provide the people with a new sense of hope.

His vision of dry bones being put back together again with life and vitality not only forecasts the future of Israel as a new and vibrant nation, but it can also be seen as an image of resurrection in general. In the recreation of the human body, it is the Spirit who is hard at work providing the gift of new life.

The reading begins with Ezekiel testifying to the Lord's inspiration and to the Spirit's guidance in the vision that has been given to him. He sees a vast plain filled with decaying human bones. These are not just bones, but they are "dry bones," indicating

even greater lifelessness than can be seen from the outside. God commands Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones; they are to "hear the word of the Lord!" The word God speaks is also to communicate the giving of spirit that will make new life spring up in the seemingly worthless bones.

When Ezekiel follows the Lord's command and prophesies over the field of bones, they begin to take human form again, but they lack the invigorating life of the spirit. Thus, God commands Ezekiel to call upon the Spirit directly. When he does so, Ezekiel witnesses a "vast army" before him

Ezekiel himself is speaking here.

God begins to speak again here.

Ezekiel himself is speaking again here.

From here to the end of the reading, God is speaking, even as he quotes the house of Israel.

I, **Ezekiel**, **prophesied** as I had been **told**,
and even as I was **prophesying** I heard a **noise**;
it was a **rattling** as the bones came together,
bone joining bone.

I saw the **sinews** and the **flesh** come **upon** them,
and the skin **cover** them, but there was no spirit in them.

Then the LORD said to me:

Prophecy to the **spirit**, **prophecy**, son of man,
and **say** to the spirit: **Thus** says the Lord GOD:
From the **four winds come**, O spirit,
and **breathe** into these **slain** that they may **come** to life.

I **prophesied** as he told me, and the spirit came **into** them;
they came **alive** and stood **upright**, a vast **army**.

Then he said to me:

Son of **man**, these **bones** are the **whole house** of Israel.

They have been **saying**,

"Our **bones** are dried up,
our **hope** is lost, and we are cut **off**."

Therefore, **prophecy** and **say** to them: **Thus** says the Lord GOD:

O my **people**, I will open your **graves**
and have you **rise** from them,
and bring you **back** to the land of **Israel**.

Then you shall **know** that I am the LORD,
when I open your **graves** and have you **rise** from them,
O my **people**!

I will put my **spirit** in you that you may **live**,
and I will **settle** you upon your **land**;
thus you shall **know** that I am the LORD.

I have **promised**, and I will **do** it, says the LORD.

full of energy and life. God then interprets the scene to Ezekiel stating that the dry bones represent the nation of Israel that cries out for new life fearing that they have nothing to hope for in their return to the land God provided. Yet the Lord promises the gift of new life. He will open their graves and restore them to life. Even more, God promises to provide them with the enduring power of his spirit who will ensure their prosperity in the land. In the context of Pentecost, this reading from Ezekiel may renew in us the frequent utterance of the

simple prayer "Come, Holy Spirit," seeking to find new life in what might appear as hopeless, death-dealing situations in our own lives.

READING IV The Book of Joel is a two-part prophecy. The first part of the book, chapters 1 and 2, tell the story of a plague of locusts that serves to provoke the lamentation of the people of Israel. Joel calls the nation to repentance and prayer and is given the vision of a restored land that produces fruit in abun-

dance. The second part of the book, chapters 3 and 4, issues forth God's judgment upon all the nations, with the assurance that God will spare everyone "who calls on the name of the LORD"

Our reading today is the opening of the book's second half. It begins with the outpouring of the spirit of God on all people. In other words, there is a universality in God's giving of the Spirit—all people on earth are recipients of this gift and therefore have the opportunity to respond to God's initiative. The reading continues by

For meditation and context:

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 107:2–3, 4–5, 6–7, 8–9

R. Give thanks to the Lord; his love is everlasting.

or

R. Alleluia.

Let the redeemed of the LORD say,
those whom he has redeemed from the
hand of the foe
And gathered from the lands,
from the east and the west, from the north
and the south.

They went astray in the desert wilderness;
the way to an inhabited city they did
not find.

Hungry and thirsty,
their life was wasting away within them.

They cried to the LORD in their distress;
from their straits he rescued them.
And he led them by a direct way
to reach an inhabited city.

Let them give thanks to the LORD for
his mercy
and his wondrous deeds to the children
of men,

Because he satisfied the longing soul
and filled the hungry soul with
good things.

READING IV Joel 3:1–5

A reading from the Book of the Prophet Joel

Thus says the LORD:

I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh.

Your sons and daughters shall prophesy,

your old men shall dream dreams,

your young men shall see visions;

even upon the servants and the handmaids,

in those days, I will pour out my spirit.

And I will work wonders in the heavens and on the earth,

blood, fire, and columns of smoke;

the sun will be turned to darkness,

and the moon to blood,

at the coming of the day of the LORD,

the great and terrible day.

Then everyone shall be rescued

who calls on the name of the LORD;

for on Mount Zion there shall be a remnant,

as the LORD has said,

and in Jerusalem survivors

whom the LORD shall call.

A reading of a prophetic vision of a cataclysmic event. Scripture often shifts into this visionary mode—which can be exciting to proclaim because the language is so vivid.

prophesy = PROF-uh-sī

“The great and terrible day”: with these words, Joel concludes his vision.

The vision is immediately followed by the promise of rescue from God, which continues to the end of the reading. Don't overdo your reading, but you can shift to a slightly more optimistic tone.

outlining those who will attempt to awaken all people to God's power; the young and the old, men and women, servants and handmaids will all be charged with the responsibility to prophesy in God's name.

Joel's vision proceeds to describe the wonders that God will perform in announcing his judgement upon earth. Blood, fire, and smoke will cover the land, the sun will not shine, the moon will be darkened. Joel refers to the dawning of this day as “great and terrible.” Implanting this fear in the

hearts of those who have just been released from the destruction of the plague of locusts, Joel assures the people that those who remain faithful to the Lord and call upon his name will be preserved in the new world that is to come. Those who recognize God's great power and authority and respond to the promptings of the spirit by making God's greatness known will survive any peril that may come as a part of God's vindication.

EPISTLE

Living in a time when there were eyewitnesses to Christ himself, many early Christians were eager for Christ to return as he had promised. However, as time went on, some of these early Christians began to lose hope in the Lord's promise. The words we hear today in Paul's Letter to the Romans offer encouragement for Christians awaiting the coming kingdom of God. Their efforts are not made in vain but are done in cooperation with the Spirit.

For meditation and context:

A reading that contains a potent and not easily digested message: That life is challenging—Paul compares it to childbirth—and its pain does not abate, even as we hope for its end. Nevertheless, we hope.

The first line after the greeting contains the core of Paul’s message. Emphasize “know,” “groaning,” and “now.”

Slight extra emphasis on “endurance.”

“In the same way”: Paul intends to compare our life to the work of the Holy Spirit, who comes to our aid. In the Spirit lies our hope.

The opening words of this reading are vivid in their imagery of creation groaning out with labor pains, waiting for the fullness of the day of redemption. Paul uses this image to connect with Christians awaiting Christ; they yearn from the depths of their beings for the coming of this day. Followers of Jesus are accompanied by the Spirit, who assists in guiding and directing the hope that looks forward to the day of final salvation. Paul provides an important reminder as to the true nature of hope. Hope looks to what has not been attained,

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 104:1–2a, 24, 35c, 27–28, 29bc–30 (30)

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

or
R. Alleluia.

Bless the LORD, O my soul!
O LORD, my God, you are great indeed!
You are clothed with majesty and glory,
robed in light as with a cloak.

How manifold are your works, O LORD!
In wisdom you have wrought them all—
the earth is full of your creatures;
bless the LORD, O my soul! Alleluia.

Creatures all look to you
to give them food in due time.
When you give it to them, they gather it;
when you open your hand, they are filled
with good things.

If you take away their breath, they perish
and return to their dust.
When you send forth your spirit,
they are created,
and you renew the face of the earth.

EPISTLE Romans 8:22–27

A reading from the Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans

Brothers and sisters:

We know that all creation is groaning in labor pains even until now;

and not only that, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves

as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

For in hope we were saved.

Now hope that sees is not hope.

For who hopes for what one sees?

But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait with endurance.

In the same way, the Spirit too comes to the aid of our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.

And the one who searches hearts

knows what is the intention of the Spirit,

because he intercedes for the holy ones

according to God’s will.

and it is the Spirit who provides the hope necessary to endure the unknown. This applies also to the action of our prayer. By one’s own power, prayer lacks confidence, but with the aid of the Spirit, one discovers how to pray and be heard by God.

Echoing his first imagery of creation groaning and laboring, Paul notes that in our prayer “the Spirit himself intercedes with inexpressible groanings.” The Christian’s effort must be attuned to cooperating with the movement of the Holy Spirit. Through this intercession of the

Spirit, the Christian is guided along the path of holiness. When left to themselves, humans will always fall short of comprehending the will of God. However, with the power of the Spirit at work within them and in the world, disciples can hope that all of creation is moving toward God.

GOSPEL

Today’s passage from the Gospel of John takes place at the conclusion of the eight-day feast of Tabernacles. The feast of Tabernacles was one of the three great pilgrimage festivals—

GOSPEL John 7:37–39

A reading from the holy Gospel according to John

On the **last** and greatest day of the feast,
 Jesus stood up and **exclaimed**,
 “Let anyone who **thirsts** come to me and **drink**.
 As Scripture says:
***Rivers of living water will flow from within him who
 believes in me.***”

He said this in reference to the **Spirit**
 that **those** who came to **believe** in him were to **receive**.
 There was, of course, no **Spirit** yet,
 because **Jesus** had not yet been **glorified**.

A brief reading with an extraordinary exhortation embedded in it.

“Rivers of living water” is an especially evocative phrase, especially as a sign of belief.

The reading concludes with an anticipatory claim about Jesus’ eventual glorification.

Pesach (Passover), *Shavuot* (Pentecost), and *Sukkot* (Tabernacles)—all of which required an annual journey to the Temple in Jerusalem in order to offer a sacrifice. The late-summer/early-autumn feast of Tabernacles celebrates the harvest and asks God for the blessing of plentiful rain for the fruition of next year’s crops. It also commemorates the Israelite’s freedom from slavery in Egypt and God’s protection of his people. Building on the theme of abundant rain, Jesus speaks within this context and invites people to come to him

for “living water.” In a not-so-subtle way, Jesus is using this traditional Jewish feast to reveal himself as the one who has the ability to bestow life in abundance. These words of Jesus cause the crowds to discuss anew how it is that he could be the Christ, the anointed one of God (in the verses following today’s reading; see John 7:40–52).

This short passage moves from Jesus’ proclamation about the true source of life to John’s interpretation that Jesus’ words serve as a foreshadowing of the giving of the Holy Spirit. John notes that it is the

Spirit himself who is the “living water” that flows from the source of the glorified Lord. These explanatory comments from John are consistent with Johannine theology that reserves the giving of the Spirit to the Church after the Lord’s resurrection (for example, John 20:22). While Jesus provides the invitation to the people around him to come to him to quench their thirst, he is also looking toward the time of the Church, when the Spirit will guide and support his followers after he has returned to the Father. S.W.