

# PENTECOST SUNDAY: VIGIL

## LECTONARY #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. »

Genesis = JEN-uh-sihns

Distinguish between the different voices: the people, the narrator, and the Lord.

Shinar = SHI-nahr or SHEE-nahr

Give some energy to the first plan and

increase it for the second.

bitumen = bih-TYOO-m\*n or bih-TOO-m\*n

or bit-TYOO-m\*n = asphalt

Pause slightly after "earth" for a scene

change.

Change tone to report what the narrative

signifies.

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

### READING I

Easter Time ends with the celebration of Pentecost, the Masses of the Vigil (today) and the day (tomorrow). Originally a Jewish pilgrimage festival, Pentecost (the Feast of Weeks [Shavuot]) comes seven weeks after the cutting of the first shear of grain at Passover. Its Greek name, *Pentecost*, signifies fifty days between the two festivals. For Christians,

Coming at the end of the first section of Genesis, which describes the world's primordial history (Genesis 1-11), the story of the tower of Babel acts as a kind of "anti-Pentecost" account, giving us context for why the descent of the Spirit in Acts 2:1-13 was so significant. The primordial history explains why salvation history was needed

this is the day when the Holy Spirit descended upon the apostles, resulting in creation and structured by frequent genealogies. Genesis 1-11 tells the sad story of alienation between God and humans and our understanding of this pivotal event in salvation history. Pentecost, resulting in purification of the earth of sin and restore original innocence. The progressive corruption reaches a high point in today's first reading about the tower. After Noah and his sons are told to "fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1), the tower story recalls how the whole world, speaking one

Babel = BAY-B\*! or BAB-\*!

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

For meditation and context:

Exodus = EK-suh-duhns

This is a theophany, the appearance of God to a human.

Read with authority.

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 to 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.

language, determines to settle in one place, build a city, and make a name for itself, so that the peoples would not "be scattered all over the earth." Several terms in today's reading can be understood to allude to other terms that might be more familiar to us. For example, "Shinar" refers to Babylonia in Mesopotamia, "Babel" refers to Babylon, and the "tower" could refer to a ziggurat (an ancient temple tower that projected Mesopotamian greatness and served as a "mountain" where earth and heaven meet). The corruption that shapes this reading is the people's striking deter-

mination to ignore God's will, echoing the Fall in Genesis 3, where the quest for knowledge and equality with God led to profound alienation. The story is divided between humanity's actions (verses 1-4) and God's deliberation and action to avert the progression of corruption (verses 5-9). The people's prideful defiance against God results in the "confusion" (*bill* in Hebrew) of language, playing on the name of the place, "Babel" (*bbil* in Hebrew). In the end, lan-

READING II

The Exodus account of Israel at Sinai, with its covenant and commandments, is often seen as the highpoint of the first five books of the Bible. Everything from Genesis and the first part of Exodus leads to this event. Having been set apart as God's chosen

When he set before them all that the LORD had ordered him to tell them, 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, praise-worthy and exalted above all forever;	Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praise-worthy and glorious above all for all ages.
Blessed are you, O Lord, the God of our fathers, praise-worthy and exalted above all forever;	Blessed are you in the temple of your holy glory, praise-worthy and glorious above all for all ages.
Blessed are you on the throne of your Kingdom, praise-worthy and exalted above all forever.	Blessed are you who look into the depths from your throne upon the cherubim, praise-worthy and exalted above all forever.
Blessed are you on the throne of your Kingdom, praise-worthy and exalted above all forever.	Blessed are you in the firmament of heaven, praise-worthy and glorious forever.

Or:

ship by describing what has been done for the Israelites. Moving from a historical account ("how I treated the Egyptians") to a powerful poetic image ("I bore you up on eagle wings"), God justifies the new relationship. If Israel agrees to its terms, the Israelites will be God's "special possession" (*segullah* in Hebrew), becoming "a kingdom of priests, a holy nation." Embedded in these terms are important insights: Israel will be a sovereign nation, not under the control of other nations, and Israel will have a special role as a holy and priestly nation among other nations, distinctive and set apart. Without having yet heard the details, the people unanimously agree to the proposal. The account then moves ahead to the third day, when Moses ascends the mountain to receive the commandments (the details of the covenant). The Lord's descent is accompanied by atmospheric upheavals in nature that often describe God's arrival: thunder, lightning, fire, smoke, and clouds, as well as trumpet blasts, marking a royal arrival. The parallels with the arrival of the Spirit on Pentecost are unmistakable: the establishment of a new relationship is marked by the atmospheric

For meditation and context:

Moses is chosen to have a momentous encounter with God.

Let the drama of nature be heard. Increase your energy as you proceed.

The people respond with eagerness.

people and given instructions, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy move Israel toward its national destiny. But it is the forming of Israel's national and spiritual identity through a covenant with God that is the core of the Exodus account. While covenants of different types often defined relationships in the ancient world, the covenant between God and the house of Jacob (Israel) in Exodus is without precedent. It begins with an encounter between Moses (Israel's spokesman) and God on the mountain (the place of divine encounter). God proposes a new relation-

For meditation and context:

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  
 This is a cinematic narrative. Practice so that  
 the images are vivid.

Use an upward inflection. God is asking a  
 question of faith. Do we think God can bring  
 good to hopeless situations?

prophecy = PROF-uh-si = verb; to say what  
 will happen (different from "prophecy")

upheaval of wind and fire, indicating that  
 God is once again at work.

READING III

The sixth-century BC prophet Ezekiel is one of three major prophets in the Old Testament. Of a priestly family, he was among the first deported to Babylon in the first deportation (597 BC). Dwelling along the Chebar canal in the Babylonian town of Tel Abib, Ezekiel directed his visions and oracles to his fellow Jerusalemites in Babylon and in Jerusalem. Among his most famous visions is that of the field filled with bones.

The field of bones is a metaphor for the exiled and dispirited people of both the northern (Israel) and southern (Judah) kingdoms. Through its emphasis on the vast number and dryness of the bones, the metaphor recalls the centuries of the nation's undoing, painfully symbolized in the process of degeneration: spirit gives way to skin, giving way to flesh, giving way to sinews, giving way to a skeleton, and, finally, reduced to scattered bones. As Ezekiel prophesies over the bones, the process is reversed: bone to bone, sinew to skeleton, flesh to sinew, skin to flesh, and, finally, spirit.

The metaphor serves as a response to the nation's threefold despair over its fate: "Our bones are dried up, our hope is lost, and we are cut off." Through the metaphor, Israel is to understand that God is engaging in a similar resurrection/reversal with them. First, God will "open your graves and have you rise from them." Second, God declares, "I will put my spirit in you that you may live." Third, the people will no longer

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.

sinews = SIN-yooz  
 The sight is amazing. Start to build the  
 energy that culminates when the spirit  
 of life comes into them and they are alive.  
 Pause slightly to let the image sink in.  
 Change tone to report what the narrative  
 signifies.

Emphasize "will." We can trust God's word.

READING IV

be cut off, because God "will settle you  
 upon your land."  
 The "spirit" in this text, which is the  
 agent for reanimation and new life, antici-  
 pates the experience of the disciples at  
 Pentecost.

Although little is known of  
 the prophet Joel, or of the  
 book that bears his name, it comes from  
 the post-exilic period when Jerusalem and  
 the temple have been rebuilt, and priests  
 and elders (but no king) serve as the lead-  
 ers of the nation (late fifth to early fourth

century BC). The first half of the book  
 (1:2—2:27) bemoans a plague of locusts  
 that embodies God's retribution. The sec-  
 ond half (4:1—21) describes a future time  
 when Judah's enemies will suffer pun-  
 ishment, even as the land returns to an  
 Edenic state. Between the two halves is  
 today's reading (3:1—5), which is God's  
 promise to pour out the Spirit. The entire  
 book is influenced by the phrase "the day  
 of the Lord," used five times throughout  
 this relatively short book. It describes the  
 day when God, the divine warrior, fights  
 against his enemies.  
 The first two-thirds of the reading are  
 placed in the mouth of the Lord (beginning  
 with "I will pour"). First, the inhabitants of  
 Judah ("Your sons and daughters") are  
 addressed, declaring that all Israel, regard-  
 less of age, gender, or social standing, will  
 become prophetic mouthpieces (oracles,  
 visions, and dreams) just as Moses once  
 hoped (Numbers 11:29). In contrast, the  
 next several lines describe the Lord's "won-  
 ders" when the day of the Lord comes, with  
 no specific group being addressed. Finally,  
 in the last third of the reading ("Then every-  
 one shall be rescued . . ."), the prophet

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.	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.
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.	

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,  
and 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.

Read the following responsorial psalm  
as you prepare. The psalmist prays for  
the same spirit the prophet describes.  
prophecy = PROF-uh-si = verb; to say what  
will happen (different from "prophecy")  
God's power will be manifested in creation.  
Use a tone of amazement, instead of fear,  
for the apocalyptic language.

himself clarifies that those to be rescued  
are Jews dwelling on Mount Zion and in  
Jerusalem. Thus, Joel offers words of deliv-  
erance, restoration, and vengeance to the  
chastened remnant in Jerusalem.  
This text plays a pivotal role in Peter's  
Pentecost speech, where he cites almost  
the entire text to explain the outpouring of  
the Spirit upon him and the disciples (Acts  
2:17-21). In doing so, he alters the text,  
widening its scope to all diaspora Jews, and  
then to all people.

EPISTLE

Composed in the late ad 50s,  
Paul's letter to the Romans  
is his longest. It is also his theological  
defense of the Good News he shares. Using  
many different proofs, Paul argues that the  
Good News of Jesus Christ has something  
important to say to the Jews and Gentiles  
of his time, since all human beings are  
affected by sin.  
In Romans 8:22-27, Paul develops  
ideas about the Christian life. He argues  
that Christians live in freedom because  
they have received the gift of the Spirit.  
Relying on his conviction that the present  
age of suffering will be replaced by a future  
age of glory, Paul cites three witnesses  
to support his belief: creation, hope, and  
the Spirit.  
First, likely drawing on images from  
Isaiah's "new heavens and earth" (Isaiah  
65:17; 66:22), Paul offers a groaning cre-  
ation that awaits its own liberation as  
a counterpoint to Christian suffering in the  
present age. Each awaits liberation and  
redemption. Second, describing pagan  
hope in this world as what is seen (i.e., not  
hope), Paul notes that Christians have hope  
founded on what is *not seen*: their adoption.

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.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM Psalm 104:1-2, 24 and 35, 27-28, 29b-30 (see 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  
and return to their dust.  
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.

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. »

EPISTLE Romans 8:22-27

and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). In a lengthy section (John 7:1—8:59), Jesus' interactions on the Feast of Tabernacles are developed. Today's Gospel presents three verses that are associated with the last day of the feast. Whereas water and light played a prominent role during the celebration of the first seven days of the festival, on this "last and greatest day," Jesus identifies himself as the source of water for the thirst. The text is confusing for two reasons. First, it implies that Jesus is citing from Scripture when, in fact, no known Jewish feasts such as Sabbath, Passover, themes are ones associated with certain Jesus' identity is explored. Among those rather emphasizes themes through which John's Gospel, in contrast to the other Gospels, does not follow a strict historical chronology, but to the other Gospels, does follow a strict historical chronology, but John's Gospel, in contrast to the other Gospels, does not follow a strict historical chronology, but rather emphasizes themes through which Jesus' identity is explored. Among those themes are ones associated with certain Jewish feasts such as Sabbath, Passover,

Third, the Spirit itself gives testimony in that it intercedes for the holy ones, who in this age are beset with human weakness. Through "inexpressible groanings," the Spirit ensures that human prayer makes its way to God.

GOSPEL

John's Gospel, in contrast to the other Gospels, does not follow a strict historical chronology, but rather emphasizes themes through which Jesus' identity is explored. Among those themes are ones associated with certain Jewish feasts such as Sabbath, Passover,

Hope is a theological virtue. Paul warns it is not fully realized until the eschaton.

Paul is making an urgent appeal. Elongate "groaning"; it should be heard with heightened sensitivity to our current climate crises.

For meditation and context:

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.

Read with the presumption of agreement.  
Pause slightly to let the assembly  
internalize it.

The Spirit gives life to our prayers.

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.*"

Set the scene with a narrator's voice and  
increase your intensity when Jesus stands  
and speaks. He speaks with authority.  
Show that authority to the assembly.

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.

Return to the even tone of the narrator  
for the conclusion.

text. Homilists can then emphasize the  
identity of Jesus as the source of living  
water, even as they use the ambiguity of  
the text to imply that believers can channel  
that living water as well. S.L.

That the text is pointing to Jesus as  
the source of living water is affirmed in two  
ways. First, the verbal form "will flow"  
points to a future event, which admittedly  
could apply to Jesus or the believer. Second,  
in the final verse the evangelist explains  
that this perfect living water is associated  
with the coming of the Spirit, who cannot  
arrive until Jesus has been glorified, thus  
identifying Jesus as the source. Never-  
theless, for the sake of reading clarity, the  
Gospel text should be read as it is printed  
so that it makes sense grammatically. That  
includes maintaining the punctuation in the