

These comments present one interpretation of today's readings; other interpretations may be possible. Comments are best read with the readings.

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Jeremiah 31:1-6

NRSV

Jeremiah witnessed the fall of Jerusalem. The city was first overrun by the Babylonians in 597 BC; ten years later they occupied the whole of Judea and deported many of the leaders. Today's reading is a prophecy that the exile will end, that God will not desert Israel. It depicts the return from exile as a new exodus. The people "found grace in the wilderness" (v. 2), God loved them then and has done ever since. His love is "everlasting" (v. 3). The nation of Israel will be rebuilt, the people will make merry, and agriculture will prosper (v. 5). Even in Ephraim, the first part of the country to be conquered, the call will be to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem ("Zion", v. 6).

Psalm 118:1-2,14-24

NRSV

Vv. 1-2 are a call to thanksgiving: God's mercy, his "steadfast love", is everlasting. May "Israel" (v. 2) and "those who fear the Lord" (v. 4) proclaim this! Vv. 5-13 say that, when the psalmist (possibly the king) was in distress, he "called on the Lord", who heard him. With God on his side, there is nothing to fear; trusting in God is better than trusting in humans. Surrounded by his enemies, "in the name of the LORD I cut them off" (v. 12), with God's help. V. 15 recalls Exodus 15:2a, Israel's classic victory song sung by Moses and the Israelites after crossing the Reed Sea.

The "glad songs" are heard in the Temple, the community of the faithful. The psalmist expects to live to old age (v. 17); he will proclaim God's acts of power. He has suffered greatly at God's hands, as a discipline, but God has preserved his life. He seeks entrance to the Temple ("gates of righteousness", v. 19) to give thanks; only the godly may enter therein (v. 20). V. 22, possibly based on an ancient proverb, may speak of the king's rise to power or his victory. On this day (v. 24) God has either saved his people or punished the ungodly – or both. This is a time for rejoicing. In v. 26, all proclaim he who was "rejected" (v. 22), but is now God's chosen ruler. All the faithful share in the power and blessing of God, who "has given us light" (v. 27).

Colossians 3:1-4

The author has described baptism as being "raised with Christ" and becoming sharers in his suffering and death. In the early Church, those to be baptised removed their clothes before the rite and donned new ones after it, symbolizing the casting aside of their old ways ("died", v. 3) and their new "life" in Christ. Our reading summarizes this teaching. We already have close fellowship with Christ, but this is not yet fully revealed; our lives are still "hidden with Christ in God" (v.3), unseen by worldly people. When Christ's glory is "revealed (v. 4) at the end of time, our complete union with him will also be seen. (Early Christians saw Psalm 110:1 ". . . Sit at my right hand . . .", as showing that Jewish messianic hopes are realized in Christ.)

Being baptised has ethical implications (vv. 5-17): we are to cast aside both sins of the body (v. 5) and of the mind (v. 8). "Fornication" (v. 5), *porneia* in Greek, means all forms of sexual immorality; the "impurity" is sexual; "passion" is lust; evil desire is self-centered covetousness; "greed" motivates a person to set up a god besides God. "The wrath of God is coming" (v. 6) at the end of time on those who indulge in immorality. In the baptised community, racial and social barriers no longer exist, for "Christ is all and in all" (v. 11).

John 20:1-18

NRSV

Early on Sunday morning ("the first day of the week"), before dawn, Mary Magdalene (witness to Jesus' death and burial) comes to the tomb and finds that the "stone" door has been rolled back, so she and those with her ("we", v. 2) tell "Peter and the other disciple" (traditionally thought to be John) that they suspect that someone has removed the body. The "other disciple", apparently younger, outruns Peter (v. 5). But the orderliness of the "cloth" (v. 7) and "linen wrappings" show that the body has neither been stolen nor spiritualized. *John*, when he sees, comes to trust that God is active; by implication, Peter does not understand yet. They do not yet understand the significance of what is occurring (v. 9), of how it fits into God's plan, because they have not yet fully received the Holy Spirit.

Mary, still thinking that the body has been moved, has returned to the cemetery. In her grief, she sees "two angels in white" (v. 12), heavenly messengers. She recognizes Jesus when he calls her by name. But something has changed: they are in a new relationship: "do not hold on to me" (v. 17). To John the evangelist, Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection, exaltation and return to heavenly glory, his ascension, are parts of a single event.

