

Reading for Weekday in Ordinary Time

19th January 2026

First reading

1 Samuel 15:16-23

‘To obey is better than sacrifice. The Lord has rejected you from being king.’

In those days: Samuel said to Saul, ‘Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me this night.’ And he said to him, ‘Speak.’

And Samuel said, ‘Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And the Lord sent you on a mission and said, “Go, devote to destruction the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.” Why, then, did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you pounce on the spoil and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?’ And Saul said to Samuel, ‘I have obeyed the voice of the Lord. I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me. I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.’ And Samuel said, ‘Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.’

Responsorial Psalm

Ps 50(49):8-9. 16b-17. 21, 23. R23b

To one whose way is blameless,

I will show the salvation of God.

I do not rebuke you for your sacrifices;
your offerings are always before me.

I do not take more bullocks from your farms,
nor goats from among your herds.

How can you recite my commandments,
and take my covenant on your lips,
you who despise correction,
and cast my words behind you?

You do this, and should I keep silence?

Do you think that I am like you?

I accuse you, lay the charge before you.

A sacrifice of praise gives me honour,
and to one whose way is blameless,

I will show the salvation of God.

Gospel Acclamation

Hebrews 4:12

Alleluia, alleluia.

The word of God is living and active,
discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Alleluia.

Gospel

Mark 2:18-22

‘The bridegroom is with them.’

At that time: John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. And people came and said to Jesus, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?’ And Jesus said to them, ‘Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the wine will burst the skins — and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. But new wine is for fresh wineskins.’

Short reflection on the reading for today

Some may be puzzled by Jesus calling himself the bridegroom, in whose presence no fasting is required. He is echoing the prophets in the Old Testament who often spoke of God as the bridegroom and the people, Israel, as the bride. Spiritually, God had married this particular people, providing a joy that they must share with other nations. With the wedding imagery, Jesus implies that he has come to share God’s joy not only with the people of Israel, but with people of every nation on earth.

St Paul also uses the metaphor of marriage to illustrate how the Christian community is united with God. The Lord is our faithful spouse, who keeps faith with us even when we are unfaithful to him. That is not meant complacently, as though we may sin without consequences, but to assure us of love and mercy whenever we fail and repent. He wants his people to be as faithful to Christ as Christ is to us. The new wine of his love always needs new wine-skins; we need to keep renewing our relationship with him, making room for new insights into what life now requires of us.

Drinking wine was normal at a wedding feast, as is clear from the marriage feast of Cana. Seeing himself as the bridegroom, Jesus then likens his presence to that of new wine. The new wine of the Lord’s life-giving Gospel calls for new wine-skins. His love makes demands on us, calling on us to keep renewing our lives so that we can love as he did. New wine, fresh skins. We can never fully settle for doing things as we’ve always done them.