

## The Biblical Readings (Lectionary)

### The Revision of the Roman Lectionary (1963)

Vatican II: *The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly so that a richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative part of the sacred scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years. (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium no. 51).*

### Track 1: Sunday Mass and Solemnity Readings<sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Three Readings:

- a. Old Testament: usually “harmonized” with the Gospel
- b. Epistle (or Revelation)
- c. Gospel

#### 2. Three-Year Cycle:

- a. Gospel of Matthew: Year A
- b. Gospel of Mark: Year B
- c. Gospel of Luke: Year C

#### 3. Principles of Selection:

- a. Harmony: “between the Old and New Testament readings” (e.g., *Typology*)
- b. Semi-Continuous Reading: reads through the whole Gospel
- c. Life of Christ: unfolding mysteries of Christ over the year (cf. SC 102)

## Scripture

### Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up; and he went to the synagogue, as his custom was, on the sabbath day. *And he stood up to read; and there was given to him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me....” And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him.* (Luke 4:16-20)

### The Reading of the Law and the Prophets in the Synagogue

And on the sabbath day they [Paul and his company] went into the synagogue and sat down. *After the reading of the law and the prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent to them, saying, “Brethren, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it.”* (Acts 13:13-15; cf. Acts 15:21)

### Scripture Readings in the Early Church

Till I [Paul] come, *attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching.* (1

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<sup>1</sup> Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *Ordo Lectionum Missae*, 66-68.

Timothy 4:13)

## Tradition

### **Jewish Tradition: Two Cycles of Readings (1 yr. vs. 3 yrs.)**

The people of Palestine... complete *the reading of the Pentateuch* in three years. (Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah 29b*).<sup>2</sup>

### **Old and New Testament Readings During Mass (2<sup>nd</sup> Century)**

St. Justin Martyr: And on that day that is called Sunday all who live in the cities or in rural areas gather together in one place, and *the memoirs of the apostles* and *the writings of the prophets* are read for as long as time allows. Then after *the lector concludes*, the president verbally instructs and exhorts us to imitate all these excellent things.<sup>3</sup>

### **Only Two Readings: The Epistle and the Gospel (5<sup>th</sup> Century)**

Liber Pontificalis: He [Pope Celestine] issued many decrees, including one that before the sacrifice the 150 psalms of David should be performed antiphonally by everyone; *this used not to be done, but only St. Paul's epistle and the holy gospel were recited*...<sup>4</sup>

### **The Old Roman Lectionary (6<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries)**

1. Missal of St. Pius V: standard Roman Lectionary (1570 A.D.)
  - a. One-Year Cycle: 138 biblical passages
  - b. Two Reading Structure:
    1. The Epistle: 1<sup>st</sup> reading (from New Testament letters)
    2. The Gospel: 2<sup>nd</sup> reading (from one of Four Gospels)
  - c. Old Testament: only read in Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter vigil
  - d. Gospels: Matthew and Luke; Mark and John read infrequently
  - e. Scripture: read in Latin by priest; no ministry of Lector

## Mystagogy

### **The Two Tables of the Mass (15<sup>th</sup> Century)**

Thomas à Kempis: Without these two things I could not live well, for the Word of God is the light of my soul, and your Sacrament is the Bread of life. These could also be thought of as two tables situated on either side in the treasury of holy Mother Church. One is *the*

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<sup>2</sup> In *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* (ed. Isidore Epstein; London: Soncino, 1990), loc. cit. See Levine, *The Synagogue*, 536-540.

<sup>3</sup> Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 67. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:68. (

<sup>4</sup> *Liber Pontificalis* no. 45.1. In *The Book of Pontiffs (Liber Pontificalis): The Ancient Biographies of the First Ninety Roman Bishops to AD 715* (rev. ed.; ed. Raymond Davis; Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 33.

*table of the holy altar*, which has the holy Bread, that is, the precious Body of Christ. The other is *the table of the divine law* containing the holy doctrine that teaches the right faith and guides certainly to the most intimate part of the veil, where the Holy of Holies is. (Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* 4.11.4).<sup>5</sup>

### **The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass (1981)**

Congregation for Divine Worship and the Sacraments: In the liturgy the Church faithfully adheres to *the way Christ himself read and explained the Scriptures*, beginning with the ‘today’ of his coming forward in the synagogue and urging all to search the Scriptures. [cf. Luke 4:16-21; 24:25-35, 44-49]... *The Order of Readings for Mass aptly presents from Scripture the principal deeds and words belonging to the history of salvation*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Questions for Discussion and Reflection**

1. What are the guiding principles for the selection of the Cycle of Sunday Readings?

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2. How are the Readings at Daily Mass different than Sundays? What are the guiding principles for Daily Mass Readings?

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### **For Further Reading**

Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (21 January, 1981).

Jungmann, Joseph, S.J. *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*. 2 Volumes. Translated by Francis A. Brunner, C.S.S.R. Reprint. Notre Dame, Ind.: Christian Classics, 2012.

Bonneau, Norman. O.M.I., *The Sunday Lectionary: Ritual Word, Paschal Shape*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998.

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (trans. M. Nazarene Prestofillipo, FSP; Boston: Pauline Books, 2015), 367-68.

<sup>6</sup> Congregation for the Sacraments and Divine Worship, *The New Lectionary for the Readings at Mass, Ordo Lectionum Missae* (21 January, 1981), nos. 3, 61.