

## The Biblical Readings (Lectionary)

Now that we've finished our series of videos on the Introductory Rites of the Mass, we can turn to the next major portion of the Roman liturgy, and that is what is known as the Liturgy of the Word. So this is the part of the Mass that is focused on the written Word of God, the inspired Word of God, that comes to us in the Scriptures, through the readings, through the Responsorial Psalm, and above all through the Gospel, through the reading and proclamation of the four Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and then our responses to those Gospels with the faith that we profess in the Creed and the Prayers of the Faithful that bring that whole first part of the liturgy in the Liturgy of the Word to a conclusion.

So before we dive into the particular readings in the Liturgy of the Word that we are familiar with from the Mass, I want to just take a step back and look at the actual biblical readings as a whole in the book known as the Lectionary. Now you've probably heard of the Lectionary before. I have a copy here of the Lectionary for Sunday Masses. The Lectionary comes from the Latin word *lectio*, which literally means to read. This is why we will often refer to the biblical readings as a part of Mass, because the scripture are read in the liturgy. And out of all the parts of the Mass that have undergone changes in recent decades, especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, one of the most dramatic and visible were the revisions that were made to the Lectionary, to the readings that were made for Sunday Mass in the Roman liturgy. And in this case, I'd like to actually quote, to begin, the revisions of the Lectionary. I want to quote from the Second Vatican Council itself in its document *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, about the role of scripture in the liturgy and the role of the lectionary, the biblical readings in particular. So in 1963, when the document on the liturgy was published by the Second Vatican Council under Pope Paul VI, this is what it said about the revision of the Roman Lectionary, the revision of the Roman book of readings for Sunday masses that was to take place. Vatican II taught this:

*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.*<sup>1</sup>

Now those of you who maybe were alive at the time of the Council or remember the Mass before the Second Vatican Council might remember that before Vatican II, the cycle of readings in the Roman lectionary, it was on a one year cycle. In other words, every year you would hear the same readings each Sunday, over and over again on that one year annual cycle. And we see that in the Second Vatican Council the Church wanted to give the people of God, they wanted to open up the treasures of the Bible more lavishly so that the people would hear more readings and more scriptures from the Old and the New Testaments. And so it was decreed that there would be a multi-year lectionary. In other words, it would take several years to read through the readings. And so what happened and what was published by Pope Paul VI, eventually in 1970, was the new lectionary for the new missal, which isn't based on a one year reading of Sunday readings or a one year lectionary of Sunday readings, but rather is based on a three-year cycle of Sunday readings. You can actually see this if you just look at the little books, for example, I have two missals here. One of them is a 1962 missal from before the Second Vatican Council and then this is the Daily Roman Missal that I'll often bring to Mass, which is for the new missal, the post-conciliar missal. And you can see that this earlier missal has all of the readings, Sundays and daily masses, in one nice little volume. But you can see this one is thicker because there are going to be actually more scriptures in the post conciliar lectionary, because it's not just a one year cycle, it's a three-year cycle.

So what I want to do in this video is just take a look at that three-year cycle of Sunday readings. I'm not going to get into daily readings in this video, we're going to try to keep it simple and just focus on Sundays and then ask ourselves, where's this idea of a lectionary come from? Where does the idea of reading certain biblical readings at annual, weekly worship come from in Scripture? Where's it from in the tradition? And then also, finally, what are we supposed to be doing during the Liturgy of the Word? Like, what's our disposition? What does the Church calling us to do? Why do we have all these readings at the Mass? Maybe you've wondered

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<sup>1</sup> Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 51.

that, you know, the First Reading, the Psalm, the Second Reading, the Gospel. I mean, wouldn't one reading be enough? What's the purpose and the overall structure of the lectionary? And in terms of spirituality, what am I supposed to be doing interiorly? What mystery is taking place during the Liturgy of the Word and the reading of the Lectionary? So I hope this will help you get a better sense of how the Church has structured the liturgy, so that you understand the readings are not haphazard or by chance, but they're actually deliberately chosen to bring about a particular purpose in this first part of the Liturgy of the Word.

So, just to give a few basics on the Lectionary of readings for Sunday Masses. The first thing you want to notice about it is that it's based upon a cycle of three readings with a Responsorial Psalm, right? So we come to Mass, ordinarily, the first reading is going to be from the Old Testament. The vast majority of the time it'll be from the Old Testament, except during the Easter season when it'll be from the Acts of the Apostles. Second, there's going to be a Responsorial Psalm, which is technically not one of the readings because it's meant to be chanted. Ordinarily, it's to be sung, or at least recited in a kind of meditative tone, but because it is from the Scriptures and it is from the Old Testament, it is part of the Lectionary proper.

Next, then, you're going to have the Second Reading, which is from one of the writings of the Apostles. The vast majority of the time it's St. Paul, over and over and over again. A lot of times, Catholics sometimes, and Protestants as well sometimes, will think of St. Paul as like the first proto-Protestant, or lots of Protestant preachers love to quote from Paul. But we often forget that Paul is read at almost every single Catholic Mass from, what we know as, the Second Reading, sometimes called the Epistle. The exception to that again, is going to be Easter season, where we're going to have the letters of Peter and James and John, especially in the Apocalypse, also read because the Second Reading is really the preaching of the apostles. So if you want to think of the first reading as the Prophets, the Old Testament, and the Second Reading as the Apostles.

So we have the old and the new in the First and the Second Reading. And then finally, the climax of the cycle of readings is the reading of the Holy Gospel, right? The good news, that's what the word gospel means, of Jesus Christ from either the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. That really is the apex of the Liturgy of

the Word and the Lectionary readings. Now, when it comes to the Gospels, the second major observation you want to know about the Lectionary is that the Gospels are based on a three-year cycle of readings. So we saw Vatican II calling for a multi-year Lectionary cycle so that people could hear more of the Scriptures. Well, I think most people, actually many Catholics I've met who go to Mass regularly, are familiar with the fact that there is this three-year cycle of Sunday readings from the Gospels. Year A is from the Gospel of Matthew, Year B is from the Gospel of Mark, and Year C is from the Gospel of Luke. Now, you might be thinking, well wait, what about the 4th Gospel? What about the Gospel of John? Well, the Gospel of John is so important that the Church reads from it every single year. And so, unlike the other three Gospels which have a specific year where we are going to work through them, John is, so to speak, scattered throughout the year, especially during the Lenten season and Easter seasons, as well as in the year of Mark, which is a little bit shorter, we're going to take a break in the summer and read through some really crucial passages in John, like the Bread of Life discourse. You'll notice that in Year B, we'll work through the Gospel of John for several weeks in the summer time of Year B.

So in this three-year cycle, what the Church does is give us an abundance of readings from the Gospels. And I have to say that with regard to the new Lectionary, if there's any place where it is really, really successful, it's in making Catholics familiar with the vast bulk of the words and actions of Jesus from the four Gospels. If you go to Sunday Mass faithfully and you listen to the Gospel readings faithfully, you are going to learn what Jesus of Nazareth did and what Jesus of Nazareth said during his earthly ministry in all four Gospels. It is a wonderful, wonderful repertoire, a kind of window into the life, teachings and of course then death and resurrection of Christ.

Now, the third aspect of a kind of basic introduction to the Lectionary that you want to be familiar with is how the readings are chosen, how the readings are chosen. And this is the part I think that for me at least as a Catholic growing up, and maybe for many other Catholics, they don't really understand. Like when I went to Mass, I mean, I knew, I think I picked up eventually that the First Reading is from the Old Testament, Second Reading was from St. Paul, and then that the third reading was from the Gospels. I kind of picked that up. But what I didn't

understand is where are these coming from? Why have they been chosen? I mean, I didn't necessarily see the thread that bound them together or what the logic was behind the selection until I had to teach a course on introducing the scriptures and I began reading for myself from the Lectionary, the book on the Lectionary about the rationale for the order of the readings. So if you have a lectionary for Mass, and if you're interested in this subject, the place to go is at the beginning of the book, the lectionary itself, there's a document called *The Order for the Readings for Mass*. In Latin the name is *Ordo Lectionum Missae. The Order of Readings for Mass*. And it's a document, it's a wonderful document at the beginning of the lectionary. This is the official Church explanation, this is the Magisterium's explanation of how the readings are chosen for Mass. It even has some charts kind of laying out for you the selection process and how they're all arranged. And in that document, on *The Order of Readings for Mass*, the Church highlights three key principles for how the readings for Sundays are selected.

First, this what's called the principle of harmony. And the principle of harmony means that the readings are going to be selected for most Sundays, not every Sunday, in order to bring out the unity between the Old and the New Testaments. So on most Sundays of the year, especially in Ordinary Time, if you look at the Old Testament reading and you look at the New Testament reading, the Old Testament is going to anticipate the New and then the New Testament is going to be a fulfillment of the Old, to show the harmony of salvation history, and how God's plan wasn't just something he decided to do in the New Testament, but which is prefigured in the Old and fulfilled in the New. You might have heard St. Augustine's teaching that the New Testament is concealed in the Old, and the Old is revealed in the New. Well, that's the principle of harmony. That's how the Old and New Testament readings are chosen throughout the Sundays of Ordinary Time in the year.

A second principle that I think people are less familiar with is what's called the principle of semi-continuous reading. In other words, if you look through the readings for the Lectionary, one of the principles of selection is that we're going to work through a particular book of the Bible in a semi-continuous way. In other words, we're going to take some part of chapter one and then we'll move to chapter two the next week, chapter three the next week, chapter four, so on and so forth.

This is, of course, how the Gospels are arranged. If you look at Sundays in Ordinary Time throughout the year, we're going to start at the beginning of Matthew with the baptism of the Lord, and then we're going to work through the public life of Jesus all the way up to his final eschatological discourse at the end of the year of Advent. So we're reading through the Gospel of Matthew semi-continuously. I think most people, or lots of people would be familiar with that for the Gospels. What people don't often know is that the same thing is true for the Second Reading. So when it comes to the readings from St. Paul in the year, we are also working through the letters of St. Paul over the course of a three-year cycle. So there's actually a little chart here in the Lectionary that I found very helpful, which gives you the semi-continuous reading of the letters of Paul. So for year A, we're not just picking random passages, we're actually working through First Corinthians, the Letter to the Romans, Philippians and 1 Thessalonians in order. And then for year B for the second reading, we're working through 2 Corinthians and Ephesians and Hebrews in order. And then for year C, same thing, we are working through Galatians, Colossians, 2 Timothy, 2 Thessalonians in order. So that there is a rationale to the selection of those second readings that's meant to again, over the course of three years, we're not only going to hear most of the material in the Gospels, we're also going to hear a lot of the material from the letters of St. Paul and some of the other Apostolic letters in the New Testament. So that's the rationale for semi-continuous reading.

And then finally, there's the principle of reading the Scriptures in order to get a glimpse of the life of Christ, So when we go through the Gospels, we're not just, you know, working through a book of the New Testament. The whole liturgical year, the whole Lectionary, is set up to unfold the mysteries of Christ's life over the course of the year. Through Ordinary Time we look from his baptism through his public ministry all the way up to his final discourse before his Passion. During Lent we kind of work through key moments in the Gospels, like the Transfiguration and other moments to lead up to, of course, his Passion Week. His Passion, His death and his Resurrection. And then, of course, during Advent and Christmas, we're preparing for the birth of Christ and then celebrating His birth and reading those Gospels during the Christmas season. So the whole Lectionary is meant to induct us into the mysteries of Christ, to the mysteries of His birth, the mystery of His life, and the mystery of His passion, death, resurrection, and

ascension into heaven and the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. So it couldn't be further from the truth if you thought the Lectionary was just kind of random readings. There's nothing random at all about them. They really are very strategically chosen, and they are a beautiful, beautiful way to enter into the mystery of the Sacred Scriptures, both Old and New Testament, above all the Gospels. Now that's a kind of a whirlwind tour. I mean it's a basic overview. If you want more on the Lectionary, I can't recommend highly enough reading that document on *The Order of Readings for Mass* at the beginning of the Lectionary for Sunday masses. You can find a translation of it online as well. If you look up *Ordo Lectionum Missae* online, you'll find an English version of that. It's a very, very helpful book.

Now with that said, we want to ask ourselves, why do we do this? Where is the idea of a Lectionary from in scripture and in tradition? So let's get my Bible and we'll take a look at this. The first place we want to look is the Gospel of Luke 4. You won't be surprised to hear me say that the idea of selected biblical readings and a kind of form of a Lectionary is something that goes back to Judaism, right? So the Jewish roots of the Lectionary, we see signs of this already in the 1st century AD in the account of Jesus' first homily, his first sermon in the in the city of Nazareth in Luke 4, where we can already see that the idea of fixed readings were part of synagogue worship in the 1st century AD. This is what Luke 4:16 says:

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 if you skip down to verse 20, it says:

*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.<sup>2</sup>*

Alright, so pause there. I know you know that story. I'm sure you're familiar with it. There's so many things we could say about it, but for our purposes in this video, the main point I want to highlight is it's a little witness to the fact that there were set scriptural readings for Saturday worship, Sabbath worship in the Jewish synagogue at the time of Jesus. So when he goes into the synagogue, there are actually 2 readings that were common at that time. We only see a glimpse of one of them here. There would be a reading from the Torah, which would be one of the five books attributed to Moses: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and then a reading from the prophets. In this case we see him being given the book of the prophet Isaiah so that he can read the set reading for that day, which was Isaiah 61. And you'll notice, Jesus didn't get to pick which reading he felt like reading that day. He didn't choose. They didn't ask what's your favorite passage? No, there was a set reading already that was given to him. And it just so happened to be the reading about the Messiah, about the anointed one, who would be anointed with the Spirit and then who would proclaim the good news, the gospel of the age of salvation having come. So that's an example of the lectionary of Judaism at the time of Jesus.

Another scriptural witness to the Lectionary comes from the book of Acts 13. Here we see Paul and the Apostles beginning to spread the gospel, and they would always, in the book of Acts, go first to the synagogue in order to proclaim Jesus as the Christ. And in the book of Acts 13 it says this:

*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."*

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<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible citations/quotations herein are from *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition*. New York: National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, 1994.



So, notice here, we have two readings. So it's multiple readings going on in the synagogue. The first reading is from the law and the second reading is from the prophets. And then after the readings you're going to have a homily, a word of exhortation that Paul is invited to give. We'll come back to the homily in a later video, but you see the basic idea here of a kind of cycle of readings that's fixed that Paul and them are invited to comment on, but they don't get to choose what their readings are going to be. Finally, in the early Church itself, once the Christians begin to meet together for worship, St. Paul in his First Letter to Timothy 4:13 is going to tell Timothy, who appears to be a young Bishop, to attend to the public reading of Scripture. So the reading of Scripture to the people was an important part, an integral part, not just of the liturgy of Judaism, but of the liturgy of the early Church in the letters of St. Paul. So this is where we get the idea of a Lectionary, of scripture being read aloud to the faithful, to the people of God, so they can hear it and have it explained to them in some form of sermon or homily. But it's fixed, there's some set prescribed readings.

Now with that said, that's just some windows into scripture, into kind of the Jewish roots of scripture readings that will eventually be codified as a kind of a Lectionary. What about the tradition? What about ancient tradition about the Lectionary? Well, I could do a whole video just on that. I mean, we could take lots and lots of time, but let me just make a few basic points that I think will be helpful. And again, I'm going to start with Jewish tradition. It's very interesting. If you look at an ancient Jewish collection of writings known as the Babylonian Talmud. This is basically like, this is just one of 30 volumes by the way. It's a collection of sayings from rabbis and teachers in the Jewish tradition going back to the 1st century BC, all the way through the 3rd, 4th and 5th centuries AD. And in one of the treatises, called *Megillah*, which is on the scrolls that would be read in the synagogue, there is actually a statement about the fact that there were cycles of readings in Judaism already and they said there were two different cycles. Among the Jews in Babylonia, in their traditions they had a one year cycle of readings. In other words, they would read through the Law and the Prophets, the selected readings, in one year. But in Palestine, as it describes it, in other words, in the Holy Land, there was a three-year cycle of readings that was used. So the Babylonian Talmud tractate *Megillah* says this:

The people of Palestine... complete *the reading of the Pentateuch in three years*. (Babylonian Talmud, *Megillah 29b*).<sup>3</sup>

Whereas they did it in only one. So a one year cycle and a three-year cycle, these two kinds of cycles are part of Jewish tradition. And since Jesus lived in the Holy Land, it's reasonable to conclude, if this is an accurate tradition going back to the 1st century, which most scholars think it is, that Jesus and Mary and Joseph and the other Apostles would have been familiar with a three-year cycle of lectionary readings from the Law and the Prophets as they would work through those set readings. So that's an ancient Jewish tradition, a really cool parallel with the contemporary 3 year cycle of readings for the post Vatican 2 Roman Missal.

Now, what about ancient Christian tradition? Well, man, there's so much evidence for the lectionary in the Christian tradition. The first place to look is a place I'm going to go back to over and over again in these videos on the Mass, and that's St. Justin Martyr in his description of the Roman liturgy in the 2nd century AD, like around 155. So this is very early. He describes that already there was a custom of reading from the Old and New Testaments, and this is how he describes it:

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*.

As a Bible scholar I like this, long readings. We are going to read from the scriptures for as much as we can in the time permitted. Then he continues:

Then after *the lector concludes*, the president verbally instructs and exhorts us to imitate all these excellent things.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</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>4</sup> Justin Martyr, 1 Apology 67. In Johnson, *Worship in the Early Church*, 1:68.

So, you'll notice what Justin says here. We have readings from the writings of the Prophets and the memoirs of the Apostles. So we can see two kinds of readings there. First, Old Testament readings, the Prophets, and then second, Apostolic readings, like above all the Gospels, which will then presumably be followed by a homily, some kind of explanation from the presider. So we already see in the 2nd century AD that in the Church at Rome, both the Old Testament and the New Testament are being read not just in the early Church, at St. Paul or in the synagogue where they read the prophets, but all the way into the early Church in Rome in the 2nd century AD. So that's Justin Martyr in the 2nd century AD, we see in the Church of Rome readings from the Old Testament and readings from the New Testament, the Gospels, the Apostles. Now, that system of readings is still developing and they're actually going to be some changes that take place over time, and there'll be a variety of different approaches in different places.

So for example, in the 6th century AD, there's a book called *The Book of the Pontiffs*. It's a collection of Roman traditions about the popes and their interventions in the liturgy. And according to that book, by the 5th century AD, the Old Testament reading had dropped out and the Church of Rome had adopted a 2 reading cycle, where you would only hear the reading from St. Paul, which is called the Epistle, and from the Gospel. So for example, this is what *The Book of Pontiff* says about Pope Celestine in the 5th century:

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>5</sup>

We will come back to the Responsorial Psalm in a different video, but for now I just want you to focus on the fact that what this ancient book is saying is that in Rome they would just read from the epistle from St. Paul and from the Gospel. So there is no mention of an Old Testament reading per se. The Psalm might function in that way, because obviously that's from the Old Testament, but the idea of a

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<sup>5</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.

reading from the Old Testament is not part of the Roman tradition as described in the 5th century. However, this is interesting, there are other witnesses to the Roman tradition that point to an older cycle of three readings where you have the Old Testament, an Epistle or the Second Reading, and then the Gospel. So for example, there's a classic book called *Medieval Liturgy: An Introduction to the Sources* by Cyrille Vogel. And you can see I've got a few tabs here for all the important parts. It's a masterpiece. But in it he talks about a book, one of the ancient lectionaries. It's called the Capitulary of Wurzburg. This is about from the 8th century AD, and this is one of the oldest copies of a Roman cycle of readings that we have. And in this 8th century version, it actually does witness to the survival of the older Roman system of three readings: Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel. Which is, of course, what is going to be restored in the Second Vatican Council, is that older system of three readings: Old Testament, Epistle and Gospel. But that doesn't happen until the 20th century.

From about really the 9th century or so, and certainly from the 13th century all the way up to the Second Vatican Council, the primary lectionary form in the Roman Church was a one year cycle of two readings. First Reading would be from the Epistle of Paul and then the second reading would be from the Gospels themselves. So that one year cycle with the two readings is going to be predominate for a large part of the Church's history. What you'll notice, what's missing from that that we're so familiar with? And that's readings from the Old Testament. So in the older form of the lectionary, where you don't have an Old Testament reading, you're not going to see as clearly the principle of harmony between Old Testament and New, where you'll see events from the Old Testament being fulfilled in the New Testament in the very readings themselves, the way their readings are set up. And so one of the things that happened in the Second Vatican Council was that the Church wanted to restore that ancient custom of reading the Old Testament as a prefiguration of the New Testament so that we can see more clearly God's plan of salvation throughout all of human history and not just the New Testament readings. And so that's going to be a really important part of the lectionary in our day, the contemporary Roman lectionary. Because remember, when Jesus goes into the synagogue, go back to Luke, and He reads, He doesn't read from the New Testament, it hasn't been written yet. He reads from Isaiah. And then what does he say? "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your ears." So the idea of the Old Testament being fulfilled in the

new, the Old Testament being fulfilled in the person of Christ, the Prophets being fulfilled in the good news of the Apostles, is something that goes all the way back to Christ's first act of reading the scripture in the synagogue at Nazareth and then proclaiming its fulfillment.

So in the lectionary what the Church is really doing is two things. First, it's spreading the table of God's word before the people of God in a lavish way so they can really feast on the inspired word of God. And second, it's reading the Scriptures in the liturgy in the way that Christ himself read and proclaimed and fulfilled the Scriptures in the synagogue in the 1st century AD, at the time of his public ministry.

Okay, so that's a whirlwind tour of the lectionary. With all that said, let's go back to the question about, what am I supposed to be doing during the readings? What's the point of the Liturgy of the Word? What's the point of having this lectionary with all these different readings? What's happening mystically here at this point in the Liturgy? And why is the Liturgy of the Word so important? Why not just, hey, let's get to the Liturgy of the Eucharist and get to the Consecration. That's what Mass is really all about, right? And I'd answer that question with two quotes. The first one is from Thomas A Kempis in his classic work from the 15th century, *The Imitation of Christ*. In this book he has a section where he talks about the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist in the Mass, and this is how he describes it. A Kempis writes:

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 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>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (trans. M. Nazarene Prestofillipo, FSP; Boston: Pauline Books, 2015), 367-68.

Wow. So this is *The Imitation of Christ*, the best selling book after the Bible in Western spirituality and in the Western church. And what is A Kempis saying? He's saying that the two parts of the Mass are like 2 tables. The table of the Word of God and the table of the Eucharist, the table of the altar. And in order for us to enter into and feast properly on the second table, the table of the Body of Christ, the table of the altar, we have to be brought into the Holy of Holies through the table of the Word, through the table of the Scriptures. That's what the lectionary is doing. That's what the Liturgy of the Word is doing. It's our doorway, so to speak, into the mystery of the Eucharist. So that calls us to be attentive, to listen carefully, and to truly treat the scriptural readings, the biblical readings at Mass as a feast. The feast of God's word that prepares us for the table of the altar, the eucharistic feast. That's from the 15th century. In our own day, the lectionary itself, that document I mentioned at the beginning, *The Order of Readings for Mass* says that the reason we do it this way, the reason we have this lectionary is real simple:

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.<sup>7</sup>

In other words, the reason we have this lectionary, especially the reason we have the Old Testament being fulfilled in the New every Mass we go to, it's because that's how Christ read the scriptures=. On that first day when he went into the synagogue, he started with the Old Testament book of Isaiah and said this scripture has been fulfilled in your ears. So you can see how the old is going to be fulfilled in the new. So the Church is following the pattern of Christ when she gives us the Liturgy of the Word that is manifested in and given to us through the lectionary.

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<sup>7</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.