

An Introduction to the *Lectionary for Mass*

Titles of Different but Related Books:



- **Bible** - all the sacred scriptures of Christianity, arranged in "canonical" order (OT & NT, from Genesis to Revelation)
- **Lectionary** - all the biblical readings used at the Eucharist and other liturgies, arranged in order of the liturgical calendar
- **Missal** - all the texts needed for Mass, including instructions, prayers, readings, some music, etc.
 - Since Vatican II, the *Roman Missal* is usually published in two parts: the *Sacramentary* (texts and prayers spoken by the priest at the altar or presider's chair, but not including the readings) and the *Lectionary for Mass* (biblical readings proclaimed from the lectern or ambo).
- **Other Catholic Ritual Books:**
 - **Book of the Gospels** - more elaborate publications of the Gospel readings from the Lectionary, esp. for use in liturgical processions
 - **Gradual** - music and lyrics for sung texts of the Mass, as well as tones for singing other liturgical texts
 - **Pontifical** - texts for ceremonies normally performed only by bishops and popes, such as ordinations and confirmations
 - **Ordos** - various publications containing the "Order of Service" (instructions, prayers, biblical readings) for specific rites and sacraments, such as Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Anointing of the Sick, Reconciliation/Penance, etc.
- **Common Lectionary / Revised Common Lectionary** - used by most mainline Protestant denominations today;
 - Sunday edition is very similar to the Catholic *Lectionary for Mass*; Weekday edition is significantly different

Historical Overview:

- **Roman Missal / *Missale Romanum*** (various pre-Vatican II editions, based on the one of Pope Pius V from 1570)
 - same readings were used year after year, on the same Sundays and feast days
 - most Masses had only two readings: one called "The Epistle" and the other "The Gospel"
 - readings were rarely from the OT, only on a few feasts, vigils, ember days, and within some liturgical octaves
 - most weekday Masses did not have proper readings, but used readings from the prior Sunday or a saint's day.
 - total biblical texts used for Sundays, vigils, and major feasts included only about 22% of the NT Gospels, 11% of the NT Epistles, and only 0.8% of the OT (not counting the Psalms).
- **Lectionary for Mass, first edition** (revision mandated by the Second Vatican Council, 1963)
 - Latin edition 1969; USA edition 1970; use began on the First Sunday of Advent: Nov. 30, 1970
 - three readings are now prescribed for Sundays & major feasts: 1) usually OT books, 2) NT Epistles, 3) NT Gospel

- there is a much greater variety of readings: 3-year Sunday rotation: Cycles A/B/C; 2-year weekday cycle: Years I/II
- total biblical texts used for Sundays, vigils, and major feasts now include about 58% of the NT Gospels, 25% of the NT Epistles, but still only 3.7% of the OT (aside from the Psalms).
- **Lectionary for Mass, second edition** (*second post-Vatican II editions*)
 - Latin edition, 1981 - based on the Neo-Vulgate Bible translation
 - Canadian edition, 1992 - based on the NRSV translation (*inclusive language dispute*)
 - USA edition: Sundays 1998, Weekdays 2002 - based mostly on the NAB translation
 - Publication of the current USA edition is normally in four volumes:
 1. **Sundays and Major Feast Days** - Years/Cycles A, B, C
 2. **Weekdays, Year I** - odd-numbered years, incl. feasts of saints with "proper" readings
 3. **Weekdays, Year II** - even-numbered years, incl. feasts of saints with "proper" readings
 4. **Common of Saints, Rituals, Votives, Various Needs** - many more choices of readings than before
- **Bible Translations used in the Lectionaries of English-Speaking Countries:**
 - **JB:** Jerusalem Bible – Australia, England/Scotland/Wales, Ireland, India (option), New Zealand, Pakistan, South Africa
 - **RSV:** Revised Standard Version – India (option)
 - **RSV-CE:** Revised Standard Version, 2nd Catholic edition – Antilles
 - **NRSV:** New Revised Standard Version – Canada; under consideration for Australia, England/ Scotland/Wales, Ireland
 - **NAB:** New American Bible (2nd ed.) – United States, Philippines

Masses for Sundays and Major Feast Days: Three Readings - really five!

1. **First Reading** - from the *Old Testament*; except from Acts of the Apostles during Easter Season
2. **Responsorial Psalm** - mostly from the Book of Psalms; sometimes other biblical "Canticles"
3. **Second Reading** - mostly from the Letters of Paul, but sometimes other *NT Epistles* and the Book of Revelation
4. **Verse before the Gospel** - usually a direct biblical quotation, but sometimes adapted from a biblical text
5. **Gospel** - Year *A: Matthew*; Year *B: Mark* mostly; Year *C: Luke*; (where's *John*? used mostly in Lent & Easter)

Masses for Weekdays, Lesser Feasts, and Special Occasions: Two Readings - really four!

1. **First Reading** - semi-continuous readings; alternate between OT & NT; on a two-year cycle
2. **Responsorial Psalm** - mostly from the Book of Psalms, but sometimes other Canticles; also on a two-year cycle
3. **Verse before the Gospel** - first edition had mostly "common" texts; now specifically prescribed texts
4. **Gospel** - same each year; semi-continuous readings from Mark, Matthew, Luke, in that order

Readings for Special Masses and Liturgies:

- **Saints** - four categories, in decreasing order of importance: Solemnities, Feasts, Memorials, Optional Memorials
 - some saints have their own "Propers" - prayers and readings specifically selected for the particular saint
 - for other feast days, texts and prayers are recommended from various "Commons" - Anniversary of the Dedication of a Church, Blessed Virgin Mary, Martyrs, Pastors, Doctors of the Church, Virgins, and Holy Men & Women
- **Ritual Masses** - incl. Christian Initiation (of adults or children; baptism, confirmation, and first communion), Conferral of Holy Orders and other Ministries, Pastoral Care of the Sick and Dying, Sacrament of Marriage, Religious Profession, Blessing of a Church or Altar, etc.
- **Masses for Various Occasions** - four subcategories:
 - for the *Holy Church* (incl. pope, pastoral meetings, unity of Christians, etc.),
 - for *Public Needs* (civil leaders, peace and justice, in time of war, etc.),
 - in *Various Public Circumstances* (new year, harvest, refugees, natural disasters, etc.),
 - and for *Various Needs* (promotion of charity, for the family, for a happy death, etc.)
- **Votive Masses** - Holy Trinity, Holy Cross, Holy Eucharist, Christ the High Priest, Holy Name of Jesus, Precious Blood, Sacred Heart, Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, All the Holy Apostles, Sts. Peter & Paul, St. Peter, St. Paul, One Holy Apostle, All the Saints
- **Masses for the Dead** - incl. Funeral Liturgies and Memorial Masses, Funerals for Baptized Children, and Funerals for Children who Died before Baptism

Concluding Notes:

- There is normally an intentional thematic connection between the *Gospel* & the *First Reading* (usually also the Resp. Psalm & Gospel Accl.); but the *Second Reading* is usually unrelated, since it follows a separate semi-continuous reading pattern.
- If one includes all the Masses for weekdays, rituals, votives, the propers and commons of saints, and special needs and occasions, the *Lectionary for Mass* now covers *much* of the NT (about 90% of the Gospels, 55% of the rest: Acts, Epistles, Revelation), but still very little of the OT (slightly over 13%), but this is understandable, given how much longer the OT is.