

How Catholics Worship: What we do and why we do it.

The Lectionary An Overview



Office of
Evangelization and Worship

Titles of Different but Related Books:

- **Bible** - all the sacred scriptures in "canonical" order from Genesis to Revelation
- **Missal** - all the texts needed for Mass, incl. prayers, readings, instructions, etc.
- **Sacramentary** - the texts and prayers used by the priest at the Mass, but not including the readings
- **Lectionary** - all the readings used at the Mass and other liturgies, arranged by the liturgical calendar
- **Book of the Gospels** - more elaborate publications, for use in liturgical processions & ceremonies
- **Ritual Books** - other publications containing instructions, prayers, and biblical readings for specific rites and sacraments, e.g. Baptisms, Weddings, Funerals, Anointing of the Sick, Reconciliation/Penance, etc.

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 Feasts
 - most Masses had only two readings: one "Epistle" and one "Gospel" (*readings from OT only very rarely, on Vigils, ember days, and other weekdays*)
 - total biblical texts used for Sundays, vigils, and major feasts included only about 22% of the NT Gospels, 11% of the NT Epistles, but only 0.8% of the OT (not counting the Psalms).
- **Lectionary for Mass** (*mandated by the Second Vatican Council, 1963*)
 - Latin edition 1969; USA edition 1970; use began 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).
- **Revised Lectionary for Mass** (*second post-Vatican II editions*)
 - second Latin edition, 1981 - based on the Neo-Vulgate Bible translation
 - 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 comprehensive.



Our Colorful Seasons of

Liturgical Calendar / Liturgical Seasons:

- **Advent** - a season of watchful preparation, up to 4 weeks long; begins four Sundays before Christmas (Nov. 27 to Dec. 3)
- **CHRISTMAS** - not just Christmas Day itself (Dec. 25), but continued celebration 2-3 weeks *after*.
 - o **Christmas Season** = from the Christmas Vigil (Dec. 24 eve), to Epiphany (Jan. 6), to the Baptism of the Lord (mid-Jan.)
 - o **Ordinary Time I** - between the seasons of Christmas and Lent; called "*Season of Epiphany*" in some Protestant Churches
 - o **Lent** - a season of penitential preparation ("forty days"), from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday morning
 - o **Holy Week** = week before Easter, beginning on Palm Sunday (a.k.a. Passion Sunday), and including the Easter Triduum
 - o **EASTER** - not just Easter Sunday itself (rule for movable date: *first Sunday after first full moon after vernal equinox*)
 - o **Easter Triduum** = "three holy days" from Holy Thursday evening, to Good Friday, to the Easter Vigil and Easter Sunday
 - o **Easter Season** = 50 days (7 weeks) from Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday; the first week is a special "*Easter Octave*"
 - o **Ordinary Time II** - after Pentecost, until the next Advent;
- o **Liturgical Colors:**
 - **Advent** - **Purple**, except for *Rose* (optional) on the Third Sunday of Advent ("Gaudete Sunday")
 - **Christmas** - **White** or **Gold** (not red and green!)
 - **Lent** - **Purple**, except for *Rose* (optional) on the Fifth Sunday of Lent ("Laetare Sunday") and **Red** on Palm Sunday
 - **Easter Triduum** - **White** or **Gold** on Holy Thursday and at the Easter Vigil; **Red** on Good Friday
 - **Easter Season** - **White** or **Gold**, except for **Red** on Pentecost Sunday followed by Trinity Sunday; **White** followed by Body and Blood of Christ **White**
 - **Ordinary Time** - **Green**, except for special colors on particular feasts or occasions, as follows:
 - o **White** - Solemnities of the Lord and the Saints; major local feasts; funeral liturgies (*Black* also allowed)
 - o **Red** - feasts of the Apostles, Martyrs, or the Holy Spirit

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**, (*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
 - o some saints have their own "Propers" - prayers, readings specifically selected for the saint
 - o other saints and feast days recommend texts and prayers to be taken from various "Commons" - Anniversary of the Dedication of a Church, Blessed Virgin Mary, Martyrs, Pastors, Doctors of the Church, Virgins, and Holy Men and Women
 - o **"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.
 - o **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.)
 - o **"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
 - o **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 Psalm & Gospel Acclamation); 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 the much greater length of the OT.