

## Preparing to Read the Scriptures at Mass

[In] the Liturgy of the Word . . . God speaks to us, and the same Holy Spirit who inspired the sacred Scriptures opens our minds and hearts to that living word. At the table of God's word, we find nourishment for our lives as we listen to the Old and the New Testaments proclaim the one mystery of Christ and call for our response. Drawing from the richness of the Church's Lectionary, the Liturgy of the Word invites us to silent openness to God's saving message as it resounds in the ecclesial assembly and continues God's constant dialogue with his people, the Church.

Pope Francis, General Audience, 31<sup>st</sup> January 2018

### Finding the Scripture Readings

If you don't have access to a Missal, or to the Lectionary, you can find the readings for each day on the Parish website: <http://www.stcolumbkille.org.uk/mass-readings-of-the-day/>.

### Understanding the Lectionary

The scripture passages in the Lectionary have been carefully chosen and arranged to present the history of salvation and to help listeners to deepen their understanding of our faith.

| <b>Sundays and Feast days</b>   | <b>Weekdays</b>  |
|---|--|
| present the more important biblical passages. In this way the more significant parts of God's revealed word can be read to the assembled faithful within an appropriate period of time.   | present a second series of texts from Sacred Scripture and in a sense these complement the message of salvation explained on Feast days  |
| Readings arranged in <b>3 cycles</b> :<br>Year A (Gospel of Matthew)<br>Year B (Gospel of Mark)<br>Year C (Gospel of Luke).   | Readings arranged in <b>2 cycles</b> :<br>Year I (odd-numbered years)<br>Year II (even-numbered years).  |
| <b>3 Readings:</b><br>a) First Reading: Old Testament<br>b) Second Reading: from an Apostle (either from a Letter or from the Book of Revelation, depending on the season)<br>c) Gospel Reading.<br><br>This arrangement brings out the unity of the Old and New Testaments and of the history of salvation, in which Christ is the central figure, commemorated in his paschal mystery.<br><br>Old Testament texts have been chosen mainly because of their correlation with New Testament texts read in the same Mass, and particularly with the Gospel text. | <b>2 Readings:</b><br>a) First Reading: from the Old Testament, or from an Apostle; during the Easter season from the Acts of the Apostles.<br>c) Gospel Reading.<br><br>For the 34 weeks of Ordinary Time, Gospel readings are arranged in a single cycle, repeated each year. But the first reading is arranged in a two-year cycle and is thus read every other year. |

## Recognising Themes in the Scripture readings used in special Seasons

During the liturgical season of Advent, Lent and Eastertide, the Scripture passages which are read at Sunday Mass are carefully selected to highlight important themes which are significant for the Church at these specific times of year. They are intended to explain and to prepare us for the celebration of the great significant moments in salvation history.

### ▪ Advent

Advent has two prominent features. The **first readings** are all taken from **Isaiah**, who is generally seen as the prophet par excellence of the coming of the Messiah. The **Gospel readings** are carefully patterned:

- **First Sunday of Advent:** The last Sunday of the old liturgical year and the first Sunday of the new liturgical year are always about the end of the world, the final coming of Christ.
- The **Second** and **Third** Sundays concentrate on John the Baptist, the final prophet of preparation for the Messiah. On the Second Sunday he is preparing a community for the Messiah; on the Third Sunday he points out the Lamb of God.
- On the **Fourth** Sunday we turn to Mary as she prepares for the birth of her Son.

### ▪ Lent

Lent also has two special features. It is the season in which the Old Testament comes into its own. The **first readings** work methodically through the history of salvation in the Old Testament, each of the three years having the same pattern but with different readings. They tell of a series of covenants between God and his people:

- **Sunday One:** the early myths about origins, before the covenant with Abraham.
- **Sunday Two:** the first covenant, with Abraham.
- **Sunday Three:** the great covenant with Moses on Sinai, the giving of the Law.
- **Sunday Four:** the covenant with David and the promise of the Messiah.
- **Sunday Five:** the new covenant promised by the prophets of the Exile.

The **Gospel readings** are preparing specially for Easter. The **pattern** of the Gospel readings is most fully seen in Year A (and the readings for Year A may be used also in Years B and C). All three years begin:

- **Sunday One:** the Testing of Jesus in the desert, for Lent is seen as a time of testing and trial. Jesus, Son of God, withstands the 40 days of testing in the desert which Israel, son of God, had (for 40 years) failed.
- **Sunday Two:** the Transfiguration, when the chosen apostles experience the divinity of Jesus on the holy mountain, to strengthen them against the coming torture and death of Jesus.
- **Sundays Three to Five in Year A:** three great Johannine passages to prepare for baptism or the renewal of baptismal vows at Easter. The gospel of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman teaches the mystery of living water in preparation for the washing and rebirth of baptism. The story of the Man Born Blind prepares for the enlightenment of baptism, and also builds up pressure from the blindness of the Jewish authorities. The Raising of Lazarus prepares for the gift of new life at baptism.
- **Sunday Six** is the Sunday of the Passion and the Sunday of Palms. The Gospel reading is the account of the Passion as given in the gospel of the year. John's Passion account is read on Good Friday.

▪ **Eastertide**

Eastertide is the season of newness after the baptisms. The **first reading** is, unusually, taken from the New Testament (the Acts of the Apostles), describing the life and witness of the early Church. The **second reading** is taken from an appropriate New Testament document. Thus, Year A has First Peter, which, at the time of the making of the Lectionary in the 1960s, was widely thought to be based on a baptismal instruction. Year B has First John, which concentrates on the love to be shown among disciples. Year C shows us the final glory of the Church as seen in the Book of Revelation.

The **Gospel readings** similarly have a clear pattern:

- **Sundays Two and Three** (**Sunday One** is the day of the Resurrection itself) recount the meetings with the Risen Lord.
- **Sunday Four** is Good Shepherd Sunday, with readings from John 10.
- **Sundays Five and Six** give readings from the final Discourse at the Last Supper, when Jesus is preparing the disciples for his departure and for the challenges of their mission in spreading the Good News. They are taken from John 14 and 15. Sunday Six is, of course, often ironed out by the Feast of the Ascension, which has its own readings.
- **Sunday Seven** has a reading from John 17, often known as the High Priestly Prayer, on the sanctification of Jesus by the Passion and of the disciples by the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost.

**Making sense of the Scripture Readings**

The function of the Reader is to proclaim the scriptures – enabling the congregation to open their hearts and minds to God. It is important to develop your own understanding of the passages you will read so that you can help those listening to gain a sense of their meaning, through emphasis on certain words and phrases and the use of pauses in the correct places. This requires time spent on careful and prayerful reading of each passage and reflection on its meaning.

To help you in your preparations, you can access various **Commentaries** in print and on-line.

| Website link  | Details   |
|---|---|
| <a href="http://www.lectorprep.org">www.lectorprep.org</a>  | <b>Lector Notes</b> is an excellent resource offering some historical and literary background to each Sunday reading and suggestions for how to proclaim each reading.                        |
| <a href="https://sundaycommentaries.wordpress.com/">https://sundaycommentaries.wordpress.com/</a>   | This website offers reflections on each Scripture Reading. They are written by an Italian Missionary Priest.  |
| <a href="http://www.word-sunday.com/">http://www.word-sunday.com/</a>   | Short reflections written by an American Religious Education Director on each Sunday Scripture Reading, sometimes accompanied by a short audio commentary                                     |
| <a href="https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/sunday-connection">https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/liturgical-year/sunday-connection</a> | An American Jesuit programme which provides for each Sunday some background on the Gospel Reading. A link is provided to the scripture texts but these are taken from the New American Bible. |
| <a href="https://livingspace.sacredspace.ie/">https://livingspace.sacredspace.ie/</a>   | An Irish Jesuit website giving a commentary on the day’s readings, with some suggestions for prayer.  |

The Liturgical Year ends with the Last Saturday of Ordinary Time (Saturday after Christ the King)

The Liturgical Year begins on the First Sunday of Advent

