

# How to Use the Lectionary for Mass



A lectionary is a book of readings chosen from the Bible and arranged for use in worship. In Roman Catholic worship today, there are special lectionaries for each sacrament and for other forms of ritual prayer (such as the liturgy of the hours). Usually, apart from the **Lectionary for Mass**, these lectionaries are included in the ritual books for the particular sacrament or service.

The lectionary you will use most often is the Lectionary for Mass. The **Lectionary for Mass** is currently undergoing revision, and the first volume of the two-volume revised version is due to be published soon, but most of the information offered here will still apply to the revised version of the Lectionary.

There is also an adapted form of this lectionary called **the Lectionary for Masses with Children** (see separate heading).

The **Lectionary for Mass** contains all the readings for Masses celebrated throughout the year, including special sets of readings for Masses for special occasions. There are prayers in the **Sacramentary** (see separate listing) that are coordinated with each set of readings in the Lectionary.

## Sections

1. **Proper of Seasons:** divided into Sunday Readings and Weekday Readings
2. **Proper of the Saints:** arranged by calendar date from January through December
3. **Commons**
4. **Ritual Masses**
5. Masses for Various Occasions
6. **Votive Masses**

You will probably not be dealing very much with the Sunday readings, although these are the readings that most Catholics will hear. The Sunday lectionary is arranged on a three-year cycle (A, B, C). In 1998 we use Year C. Year A begins with the First Sunday of Advent, at the end of 1998, and continues through 1999 until Cycle B begins, with Advent 1999. For each Sunday there are three readings: the first reading is usually from the Hebrew Bible, and is chosen to correspond in some way with the gospel reading; the second reading is from a part of the New Testament other than the gospels, and is usually "semi-continuous" (selections are read from the beginning of a book through to the end, without any thematic correspondence to the other readings); and the gospel reading, usually chosen in accord with the particular yearly cycle: Matthew in Year A, Mark and John in Year B, and Luke in Year C. There is also a responsorial psalm, arranged for singing that is proclaimed between the first two readings.

The weekday lectionary contains readings for weekdays in the great seasons (Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter) and for other weekdays throughout the year (Ordinary Time or, as the current Lectionary names it, the "Season of the Year"). The readings for weekdays in the great seasons are the same from year to year. The weekday lectionary for Ordinary Time is arranged this way: The gospel is the same from year to year, but the choice of first reading is arranged in a two-year cycle. Year 1 is read in odd-numbered years (1999, 2001), and Year 2 is read in even-numbered years (1998, 2000). For each weekday there is also a responsorial psalm, arranged for singing that is to be proclaimed between the first reading and the gospel.

The Proper of the Saints contains special readings assigned for the feasts and memorials of certain saints and other festivals celebrated throughout the year. Sometimes only one reading is assigned for a feast, and other

readings are to be chosen from the "Common" (see below); sometimes there is a whole set of readings for a particular feast or memorial. The same readings are assigned for each year in the sanctoral cycle.

The Commons part of the **Lectionary for Mass** contains sets of readings for particular kinds of feasts: for Masses of the Blessed Virgin Mary, feasts of martyrs, feasts of holy men or holy women, and so on. Usually, if the readings are to be chosen from the common, you are free to select any readings under the appropriate title, as long as you choose at least one reading from the Old Testament or the New Testament (apart from the gospels), a responsorial psalm, and a gospel reading. Generally, unless it's a really important feast, you are free to limit yourself to two readings (one from the Old Testament OR the New Testament plus a gospel reading) and a responsorial psalm.

The Ritual Masses section contains texts to be used in celebrating sacraments and other rituals other than Mass. (This is actually a collection of other "lectionaries," brought together in this one book for convenience. Some of these texts are chosen to be used during a Mass when another sacrament or ritual is celebrated; some are to be used apart from Mass.) Normally, if you're working in a school environment, you won't be using these texts, unless, perhaps, you're involved in celebrating a baptism or a Mass for someone who has died.

The sets of readings for Masses for Various Occasions contain texts that may be used outside of the great seasons (Advent-Christmas and Lent-Easter) when there are no special feast to be observed. On those days, you may choose to use the readings for the particular weekday in Ordinary Time, texts from a Mass for Various Occasions, or a Votive Mass. These texts for Various Occasions are very handy sets of readings to know about, because they can be used in Ordinary Time (during the school year, this means September through late November, especially, and also from about mid-January through mid- to late-February), and they can be used to celebrate or pray for particular needs. So, for example, there are texts to be used when a community focuses on vocations, persecuted Christians, peace and justice, spring planting ("For Productive Land"), the harvest, sick people, and thanksgiving for something special that has happened, and other topics.

The Votive Masses may also be used when there is no special feast to be observed during Ordinary Time. These Masses usually focus on some aspect of God (Holy Trinity, Holy Spirit) or on some aspect of the Incarnation (Triumph of the Holy Cross, Sacred Heart, Precious Blood). There is also a votive Mass for All or One of the Apostles.

## **Choosing Readings**

Often, the priest who will be presiding at a school Mass will want to be involved in choosing the readings, or will want to choose the readings personally. If you are part of a group selected to choose readings (and, perhaps, prayers), you might want to consult an **ORDO**. The ordo is a little book that lists what Mass is to be celebrated on a particular day; it also lists at least some of the options that may be used. It usually gives the Lectionary reference for that day (not a page number, but a number assigned to a particular set of readings). Most parishes have an ordo that they keep in the sacristy or in the parish office.

You can get some of the same information from a liturgical calendar, available at many Catholic religious goods stores. Some of these calendars will give you the Lectionary reference; others will simply list the assigned readings for the day, and not some of the other Masses that might be celebrated on that day.

It is always better to go to the Lectionary to find an appropriate set of readings than just to sit down with a Bible and to start choosing texts at random. The Lectionary is a rich resource for appropriate texts not only for Mass but also for other services that involve readings from Scripture. If your school prays a form of daily prayer, for example, you might use as part of that prayer the assigned gospel text for each day of the year.