

The Lectionary

Lit 84

In the Light of Conciliar and Post-Conciliar Liturgical Documents

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INTRODUCTION

The work of a priest is in some way comparable to that of a general advocate. In order to be able to defend cases of politicians, business people, doctors or clergy, the lawyer needs to some extent, besides acquiring the requisite knowledge in law, to be familiar with the world of these different areas. Similarly a priest in the modern world is prepared to serve the needs of men and women in different fields, peasants as well as politicians, traders as well as teachers. Now, while lawyers may specialise so that one finds legal representatives specifically for copyright law or computer technology, priests do not generally do so, with the exception perhaps of a few areas such as prison and military chaplains or those trained to form other priests. Adequate seminary training therefore, aims at producing priests who are “all rounded”, and who can feel comfortable in the different sectors of the ever-changing society. In working towards this end, seminary authorities have introduced, among other things affiliation to universities, local or foreign. This has in turn led to overloading of the seminary syllabus, to the bewilderment of students who have to cover so much more, as well as traditional seminary staff who must compress so much academic material within the given time, while at the same time giving enough room to the necessary spiritual and moral formation of the seminarians. The result is that in spite of the seven years of post-college training – a period which is longer than most university degrees – the time in the major seminary is hardly enough to produce an academically “well-baked” priest, not mentioning the other aspects of a priest’s training which are in no way less important.

This booklet is one in a series that emerged in the course of liturgy lectures in St. Paul’s National Seminary, at the time of affiliation to external universities. The writer realised like other fellow lecturers, that it was almost impossible to cover the material taught before the affiliation, while at the same time giving due time to the new university program. On the other hand reducing the areas covered in liturgy would have meant sending out priests who were ill-prepared for their ministry in that all-important

aspect of a pastor's life. The alternative course of action would then be to cover less in class, while giving a future priest a package of ready reference in his pastoral activity.

The series therefore is a form of liturgical companion, written particularly with a pastoral orientation. It is written with the realisation that in the modern world of fast-moving technology the most important thing is not to know all that is necessary in one's area of work, for that is absolutely impossible. Rather, it is to know where to look for the answers in case of questions. For that reason, a lot of effort has been put in referring to the basic liturgical sources that are available to pastors.

Because it is a form of "liturgical companion" it renders itself beneficial also to those priests and other pastoral workers who are already in the field. The book is not a substitution for the actual rituals. That would be both unnecessary since such rituals are available and impossible since it would imply reproducing a great bulk of material. Rather, it is a parallel to the corresponding ritual. It helps the pastor to see the rationale behind the rubrics. It brings in focus the importance of the General Introduction, Instructions or Norms, relating them to other relevant liturgical sources as well as adapting them to the present situation.

WHAT IS A LECTIONARY?

The word a “lectionary” is derived from the Latin word “lectio” meaning “reading”. “Lectionary” designates a book containing biblical pericopes or readings intended for use in the liturgy. Lectionaries are of two types. There are the full-pericope lectionaries such as those used in the Catholic Church. There are also reference type lectionaries. These contain only biblical references to the readings. One must then take the readings directly from the bible using the references given in the lectionary. Many Protestant denominations use this kind of lectionaries. The Catholic typical edition, the *Ordo Lectionum Missae* is also in this format.

The official Latin title for the lectionary then is *Ordo Lectionum Missae*. It is translated in books as the Lectionary for Mass. Others refer to it as the Order of Readings for Mass. Yet others abbreviate the title to refer it simply as the Order of Readings. But this as said before is the typical edition from which smaller components are translated. These components are designated according to their content. One finds therefore such titles as the “Order of Readings for Sundays and Feast days”, “the Order of Readings for Saints”, the “Order of Readings for Weekdays”, and so on. But these individual components may also simply bear the name “Lectionary”.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE WORD OF GOD AND LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

What is “the word of God”? We know very well what we mean by the word “word”. You might describe it as a unit of speech. Usually a single word is not sufficient to convey meaning. Rather it is a group of words formed into sentences, and sometimes several sentences together that convey meaning. But sometimes people also describe an entire speech made up of several sentences, paragraphs, even pages, as “a word”! It is not uncommon on social functions that a person says: “allow me to say a word or two...” and then goes on to speak for thirty minutes!

We also understand what we mean by “word of God.” We usually do not speak in reference to a single word. It is more or less in the sense of the

second use of “word” we have seen above. When at the end of a reading someone announces “this is the word of God” we are all aware that they are referring not just to a single word, but to the entire reading that we have just heard. In the General Instruction in fact the Word of God is understood to be synonymous not just to individual pericopes extracted from the bible, but the whole of Scripture.¹

But there is a deeper meaning of the “Word of God”. The best way to bring out this meaning is by comparing the different words used as synonyms to the “word of God”. In psalm 118 (in some versions: psalm 119)² the Word of God is synonymous to seven other words, namely: *law, decrees, ways, precepts, statutes, commandments and ordinances*. These seven words have something in common, namely the word of God challenges, requires a response, an answer. A *decree* has to be followed. When Augustus Caesar issued a decree for all the Jews to be counted in their home areas, Joseph and Mary went to Bethlehem in the same way as other Jews went to their home areas. A *way* has to be followed. A *precept* is defined as ‘a rule or guide for behaviour’, as ‘moral instruction’. It too demands to be followed. A *statute* is the same as a *law*; it is passed by a governing body and it binds the subjects of that body. A *commandment* reminds us of the ten Commandments in the Book of Exodus. They were given to be followed, with rewards for those who followed them and penalties for those who did not. An *ordinance* also has to be carried out. It was ordained that the Christ should suffer, and so he suffered, in spite of the fact that he prayed to be spared of that suffering. So in that sense the Word of God requires, expects, demands a response. It is not only something to be studied, not only something to be read, not only something to be written about; *it is something to be done*.

“Liturgical celebration” is used in the sense of official public prayer of the Church. It includes such elements as the celebration of the holy Eucharist, the celebration of the sacraments and sacramentals, the arrangement of

¹ “Granted, a case could be made here for a definition of terms, in the interests of clarity and precision. However, in this Introduction we will be content to use the terms found in the conciliar and postconciliar documents. We will also use ‘Sacred Scripture’ and ‘word of God’ interchangeably throughout to refer to the inspired books, thus avoiding confusion concerning terms or their meaning.” *General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass*, 2.

² This is one of the longest psalms in the Psalter. Incidentally those who pray the Prayer During the Day recite part of this psalm every day from Monday to Saturday. On Monday they take verses 41-48; on Tuesday verses 49-56; on Wednesday verses 57-64; on Thursday verses 65-72 on Friday verses 73-80 and on Saturday verses 81-88.

following of the liturgical year, and the celebration of the liturgy of the hours.

WHY LITURGY SHOULD BE BASED ON THE WORD OF GOD

I once had the opportunity to supply for one week in a parish in England. I had never met this parish priest, we communicated through a friend who had given me his address. When I arrived in the parish he had already parted for his short and much needed holiday. Among the pastoral activities he had left me was that of conducting a funeral. I was to meet one of the family members and arrange the details. When I met this gentleman I asked him among other things whether he wanted to choose the readings from the options given in the lectionary or from some other passages of the bible. He told me that father had left him a number of options and that he had given them to his son and daughter who would take the readings. I insisted that I would be grateful if he passed on to me their choice before the actual funeral, since this would help me in the preparation of the homily. He agreed to send them in an envelop. On the evening of the day before the funeral he sent the readings and I found them on my return to the parish after some pastoral activity. Immediately I found that they were not scriptural. I was at a loss what to do. I wanted to call the man and explain to him that it was not the usual thing to replace scriptural readings with those of our choice, and the reasons why. I recalled that he had told me that it was his children who were making the selection and that they were on their way from Canada to attend the funeral.

First Poem

“Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I, and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other that we still are.
Call me by my old familiar name,
Speak to me in the way which you always used.
Put no difference in your tone,
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.
Laugh as we always laughed at little jokes that we enjoyed together.

Let my name be ever in your household word as it always was,
Let it be spoken without affect, without the trace of shadow on it.
Life means all that it ever meant.
Life is the same as it ever was; there is unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?
I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near,
Just round the corner.
All is well.”

Second Poem

It was a sudden parting, too bitter to forget,
Those who loved you dearly are the ones who can't forget.
Your life was one of kindly deeds,
Helping hands for other's needs.
Sincere and true, in heart and mind,
Beautiful memories left behind.
The blow was hard, the shock severe,
To part with one we loved so dear.
Our loss is great, we'll not complain,
But trust in God to meet again.
Two tired eyes are sleeping,
Two willing hands are still.
The one who worked so hard for us is resting at God's will.
Our family chain is broken; nothing seems the same,
But as God calls us one by one the links shall join again.

Homily

When I spoke with Mr. Monks about the preparation for this liturgy he told me that he wanted the key note to be placed not on sorrow and mourning. And indeed that coincides with the view our faith takes on bereavement. We don't sorrow like people without hope, because we believe. The Lord Jesus gave his life for the forgiveness of our sin and in order to obtain for us the hope of eternal life. By his death Jesus showed us that death does not have the last word. It is not the worst thing that can happen to us, not even a death as ignoble as his. This is a cause of hope in the midst of our own pain and bereavement.

And yet this hope does not take away the pain of loss of a loved one. Even when this loss comes after our dear one has had a long

and happy life, still we suffer the loss. The struggle to cope with our pain sometimes can make us want to deny the very reality of death and its implications. The first poem which has just been read to us expresses so vividly this all too human tendency. "Death is nothing at all. I have only slipped away into the next room...", so we heard. We want to believe this but we know too well he is not in the next room. We would like to laugh as we always laughed at little jokes but we know the memory of the jokes that once brought laughter now brings sadness. We would want to speak to him in the way we always used to but we know if we tried we would have the feeling of speaking to ourselves. Life is not the same as it ever was, however desirable that may be.

While we would like to believe the contrary our minds are aware of another truth in the face of bereavement, and this was expressed in the second poem: "our family chain is broken; nothing seems to same..."

But in the very acceptance of this pain we create room for the comforting message from our faith; a message expressed in God's word in scripture. We have heard part of this message of consolation in the passage taken from the gospel according to St. John. "All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I shall not turn him away." Little further: "Yes, it is my Father's will that whoever sees the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and that I shall raise him up on the last day." The other comforting fact is that God does not only desire that we should have eternal life, he has absolute power over this life. He gave us this earthly life which we cherish so much, as a foretaste and a preparation to a much fuller life in eternity. And so as God calls us one by one the links of the chain that binds us all together shall join again. Through baptism Leo Monks joined the number of those whom the Father has given to the Son. Every good deed he performed, every act of faith consolidated him in that union. However, like all of us here, he had his share of human weakness. And so part of our purpose now is to implore the Father in his love and mercy, to forgive him for everything that makes him less worthy to enter the everlasting home of perfect happiness and holiness. And may we also be reminded of the

relative importance of everything in view of our final destiny.
Amen!

Liturgy should be based on the word of God in the first place because it has as basic purpose communication between human beings and God. In the liturgy we are reminded of what God has done for us, what he requires from us, and what he has promised he will do for us. In the word of God we also discover what the proper response to God should be. This comes out prominently in the psalms which are prayers composed under divine inspiration. In scripture we find those sentiments which characterise our attitude towards God such as praise, thanksgiving, repentance, supplication, petition, intercession, etc. the word of God suggests to us what we ought to do.

Secondly the word of God in the liturgy establishes and safeguards authenticity in prayer. A liturgy based on the inspired words of scripture is more likely to be free from error than one that is based on the arbitrary composition of individual or groups of worshipers.

Scripture in worship is also a basic ecumenical principle. It is scripture that is the uniting factor among diverse Christian denominations. For a long time Protestants and Catholics were at a distance with regard to matters liturgical. It was argued rightly or wrongly, that Catholic liturgy gave less prominence to the word of God in worship than it ought to have done. Rather it put emphasis on such matters as moral teaching, the memory of saints, the Eucharist, etc. today one of the prominent elements by which Protestants and Catholics have collaborated more in matters liturgical is the use of scripture in liturgy, which is arranged in a lectionary. The Catholic lectionary has been adapted with some changes by more than 10 Protestant denominations.

RECIPROCITY BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND LITURGICAL CELEBRATION

Liturgical celebrations expose the treasures of the Word of God to the faithful. They give the Word of God new meaning and new power. The word which is celebrated is interpreted and applied to the present situation, from the point of view of “today”. This is also how Jesus treated it.³ Thus,

³ Lk 4:16-21; 24:25-35; 44-49.

though the Word of God is immutable it has at the same time the power to transform and renew, to be applied to ever-changing situations.

On the other hand liturgical celebrations draw sustenance and support from the Word of God. Both the Word of God and liturgical celebration have the same aim, namely the salvation of mankind. Both have the same focal point: Jesus Christ. In Scripture the Old Testament finds fulfilment in the New.⁴ In the Liturgy the central point is the Paschal Mystery. The understanding of one leads to a greater appreciation of the other.

DIFFERENT MODES OF CELEBRATING THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LITURGY

The word of God is celebrated in various forms in the liturgy. First and foremost it is celebrated through the readings and the commentaries on them during the liturgy. It is used in the songs; when the songs are composed either directly basing on a particular text, or draw inspiration more indirectly from scripture. The eucharistical texts are also composed basing on Scripture. Such are the collects, the prefaces, the closing prayers and the Eucharistic prayers. All the sacraments draw their origin and nourishment from the Word of God.⁵ Images, words, symbols and gestures draw inspiration from Scripture. There are also many words and phrases that have directly been drawn from scripture and are used in the liturgy such as *Amen, Alleluia, Maranatha, Kyrie Eleison*, etc.

It is the action of the Holy Spirit that makes the celebration of the Word of God in the Liturgy effective.⁶ At the same time it is the listening of the faithful to this word in spirit and in truth (John 4, 23) and their generous and persevering effort to put it into practice with the assistance of the Holy Spirit that makes it effective.

⁴ GILM, 5

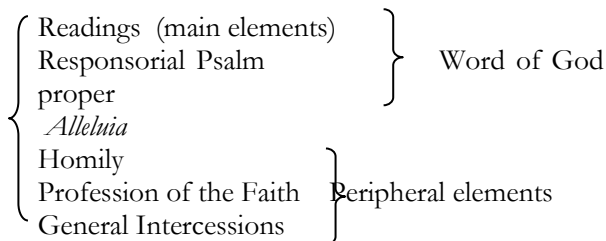
⁵ PO, 4.

⁶ GILM, 6: "The Holy Spirit makes the response effective, so that what is heard in the liturgical celebration is given expression in our lives in accordance with the text: 'be doers of the word, not hearers only.'" (James 1:23). A more comprehensive description of the Action of the Holy Spirit is given in GILM, 9.

THE WORD OF GOD IN THE CELEBRATION OF MASS

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Holy Mass is made up of two principal and integral parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Eucharist will be dealt with at a later. The components of the Liturgy of the Word are the following:



The liturgy of the Word and that of the Eucharist complement each other. The Word gives guidance to our intelligence while the Eucharist gives strength and nourishment to our wills. "Drawing spiritual nourishment from both tables, at the one the Church receives further instruction and at the other is more fully sanctified. In God's word is the announcement of the covenant, in the Eucharist is the renewal of the new and eternal covenant itself. There the history of salvation is evoked by the sounds of the words, here the same history is enacted in the liturgy's sacramental symbols.

Consequently it must always be borne in mind that the word of God read and proclaimed in the Church leads on the sacrifice of the covenant and to the banquet of grace as to its goal. The celebration of Mass, therefore, at which the word is heard and the Eucharist offered and received, is one act of divine worship by which the sacrifice of praise is offered to God and the fullness of redemption is made available to men and women."⁷

⁷ GILM; 10.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE LITURGY OF THE WORD AND THEIR RITES⁸

Readings and their Proclamation

The most important part of the Liturgy of the Word consists of the readings from sacred scripture and the songs occurring between them. The homily, the profession of faith (Creed) and the Prayer of the Faithful are secondary parts that develop and conclude the readings.⁹

Among themselves the readings again vary in importance. The gospel is the high point of the liturgy of the word. The other readings, in the traditional sequence from Old Testament to New, prepare the assembly of the faithful for the gospel.¹⁰ The importance of the readings is expressed in different ways. For example they neither be omitted nor shortened. Nor may they be substituted by non-biblical readings.¹¹

The readings should be proclaimed audibly, articulately and intelligibly. They should be taken from an approved edition. They may also be sung, but in such a way that the words are not thereby obscured, but rather highlighted.¹²

Short and suitable introductions may be given before the readings, especially before the first reading. Introductions should be given only if this is helpful for the greater comprehension of the reading. They should be simple, faithful to the text, short and carefully prepared.

The readings should be given appropriate reverence. They should be delivered from the ambo at Mass for the people. It is also better to avoid proclaiming the readings from pamphlets or missalettes.

Attention should be given to the gospel reading in particular. When a book of the Gospels is used, carried in the entrance procession by the deacon or reader, it is appropriate that it be carried from the altar to the ambo by the deacon, or if there be no deacon, by the priest, preceded by ministers with

⁸ Other related topics to the liturgy of the word: elements of the liturgy of the word GIRM 33, 131, 235; LM 11-31, 92-110, 119-125; CB 74, MCW 45; LMT 7.

⁹ GIRM; 33.

¹⁰ GILM; 13.

¹¹ Cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 62.

¹² GILM, 14

candles and incense or other symbols of veneration, according to custom. The faithful stand and, acclaiming the Lord, pay honour to the Book of the Gospels. The deacon who is to proclaim the gospel bows to the presiding priest and asks for a blessing. When no deacon is present the priest bows before the altar and prays quietly.

The readings should be introduced and concluded with the appropriate formulas. The other readings apart from the gospel are introduced with the formula “a reading from... (mentioning the full title of the book from which the reading is taken). At the end of the reading one concludes with the formula “this is the word of the Lord.” One has to avoid such fancy endings like: “this is the end of the reading”, “*and* this is the word of the Lord”, “this is the good news for us today”, etc.¹³ The gospel reading is began with “a reading from the holy gospel according to...” and concluded with “this is the gospel of the Lord”. These salutations may also be sung.¹⁴

The reading itself usually begins with a phrase that may not be found in the bible, called the *incipit*. Its purpose is not to distort the words of Scripture but to make it meaningful in the liturgical context. For instance a gospel reading might start with the words, “Jesus said to his disciples...” whereas in the particular verse in the bible the specific words are “and he said to them...” Again in the Latin lectionary it was customary to start the gospel reading with the words “in those days...” Some people today have objected that this kind of beginning, apart from not being scriptural, makes the word of God sound as if it is something of the past and not for us today. Actually there should not be such a big problem. It is not the manner of beginning the reading that makes it relevant to the present day; it is rather the explanation or homily that follows it. To acknowledge that the word of God is relevant to us today is not to deny the historical fact that it was given in a specific situation to a specific people. On the contrary, it is the full understanding of its meaning in its historical context that makes it possible for us to apply it to ourselves in our present situation.

¹³ “the word of the Lord” is the accepted formula in dioceses of the United States. Where Episcopal conferences have not adapted such a formula one should stick to the accepted norm.

¹⁴ GILM 17.

*Responsorial Psalm*¹⁵

The responsorial psalm is an integral part of the liturgy of the Word. It gives a spiritual response to the first reading. A general understanding of psalms with their biblical meaning as well as their use as Christian prayer is a necessary background for the clergy to appreciate the psalms and to be able to catechise the faithful on how to pray the psalms fruitfully.

Normally the psalm should be sung. This can be done using some published music for responsorial psalms or by means of improvised music just for the occasion. The psalm can be sung or recited alternating between the cantor and the congregation. It may also be sung entirely by the cantor with the rest of the congregation listening, although this should not be done too often in so far as it minimises active participation. The cantor may take the stanzas with the congregation repeating the response. On occasion the whole congregation may sing all the parts. Such can be the case when the responsorial psalm of the day happens to have a well known tune, such as “The Lord is my Shepherd” (psalm 22 (23)).

Replacement of the responsorial psalm with an appropriate song is an accepted practice. But it should be the exception rather than the norm, in order not to deprive the people of the rich message of the psalms which are scriptural and inspired and which have been chosen with great care as response to the first reading. It is not correct *always* to have a meditational song instead of the responsorial psalm.

As regards the manner of choice of the responsorial psalm, normally each reading is assigned its proper responsorial psalm. But sometime the choice is left to the celebrant as in the case of ritual Masses, Masses for various occasions, votive Masses and Masses for the dead. In these cases one chooses readings from the common for that particular category of Masses, as well as a suitable responsorial psalm from those given.¹⁶ In such cases again the choice should be pastorally motivated.

¹⁵ GILM, 19-22

¹⁶ unless the lectionary is made in such a way that each first reading from the Commons has an appropriate responsorial psalm.

*The Acclamation before the Reading of the Gospel*¹⁷

The Gospel Acclamation is an expression of the congregation's welcome to the Lord who is about to address them through his minister. At the same time it is a kind of profession of faith, in what is about to be said, a way of saying: "speak Lord your servant is listening, for you have the message of eternal life." Outside the Lenten season the acclamation is sung with the Alleluia or it may entirely consist of the Alleluia. In the Lenten season some other appropriate formula is to be used. One can either use the acclamation given together with the gospel reading in the lectionary, or choose from among those provided in the series for the liturgical season, or again choose from one given in the Common Acclamations series.

The acclamation should be sung with everyone standing as a mark of honour to the gospel. Except on some very solemn occasions It should not be disproportionately prolonged. It should best not be sung or read by the one who is to proclaim the gospel. Rather it should either be the one who takes the reading before the gospel, or even some other cantor.

Other accompaniments to the Word of God

The Homily¹⁸

The homily expounds the message of the reading It applies God's word to the concrete situation of the people. It explains the liturgical mystery celebrated whether this is the existing liturgical season, or a feast of the day, or the celebration of a sacrament or sacramental. In the homily the preacher can also show a link between the Liturgy of the Word and that of the Eucharist which is about to follow; for the same Jesus who feeds his people with his word also does the same with his sacramental body and blood. Obviously one must not strive to bring out all the various things that can be done through the homily in one preaching. That might be too much and indeed it may turn out to be counter-productive.

¹⁷ GIRM 37-39; 92-93; GILM 90-91.

¹⁸ GILM, 24-27; GIRM, 41-42. Other information on the homily: the homily and the assembly FYH 1-15, 56-59, 68-77; character of the homily SC 52; GIRM 41; LM 24; DMC 48; FYH 40, 50-55, 60-77, 100; interpretation of the homily FYH 25-36, 44-46; the homily in Masses with children, LM 24-25; DMC 17, 24, 47-48; preparation for the homily LM 24; FYH 78-111, 116-120; purpose of the homily: LM 24; FYH 40-49, 67, 81, regulations governing the homily: SC 52, GIRM 42, 97, 165, LM 25-26; sources for the homily: SC 35, 55, GIRM 41; LM 24; FYH 50-55.

The homily also helps to create a more personal relation between the minister and the congregation. This is done not through his gestures and eye contact. It is also done through the message itself that he communicates. In the homily he shares at a more profound level what he believes, how he understands and interprets the message of these readings, how he applies it the concrete situation in which he and his congregation lives. He may also share some of his experiences if they can be of help to edify the congregation.

On Sundays and feast days the homily is obligatory at Masses celebrated with the community. On other occasions it is recommended. One should not habitually deprive the people of an expounding of the Word on the pretext of lack of time. A short reflection of two or three minutes can change the Mass from something routine, to something meaningful. Above all the omission of a reflection should not be due to the convenience of the preacher, but only dictated by the pastoral good of the community.

As regards the quality of the homily there is no standard measure, for it depends on several factors. It depends of the giftedness of the preacher, on the way he lives his Christian life, on the attitude and receptivity of the congregation and on their different temperaments. One may hail a homily as a masterpiece and yet another person be sent to sleep by the same homily. Still something can always be done to improve the quality of one's preaching. A good homily should be well prepared. There are people who spend the whole week thinking of the Sunday homily they are going to give. There others who meet on certain occasions to discuss and prepare the homily of the next Sunday, sharing each other's insights. It is important for preachers to avail themselves what aids is provided on diocesan level. For "the diocesan bishop must diligently oversee the preaching of the homily, also publishing norms and distributing guidelines and auxiliary tools to the sacred ministers, and promoting meetings and other projects for this purpose so that they may have the opportunity to consider the nature of the homily more precisely and find help in its preparation."¹⁹

Secondly, a homily should be well meditated. The preacher ought to remember always that he can only do the planting and it is the Holy Spirit that make the word grow in the heart of the believers. It is therefore

¹⁹ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 68.

worthwhile to spend time in prayer; reflecting before God on what one is going to say to His people, and praying for the needs of those people as well. One should strive to understand the needs of the people to whom one preaches. He should strive to attune to the understanding and level of education of those to whom he preaches. A homily that makes an impact of the people is one that does not stand in contradiction with the life of the preacher as the people know him. That does not mean that the preacher should twist the word of God to match his lifestyle. On the contrary one should strive to live by what one preaches.

With regard to its content, ordinarily the homily should be based on the readings of the day.²⁰ The lectionary has been organised in such a way that a consistent preaching on the word of God throughout the liturgical year gives the people of God a wholesome catechesis on that divine message. Where possible and if this is helpful all the readings should be expounded. If there is a link between them this should be expressed. But one must avoid of finding connections even where there are none. One can also explain the readings in relation to those that have come in past days or weeks and those that are yet to come, if this edifies the people. However, one can also decide to expound one reading, or even one particular aspect of a reading. Usually the less the main ideas the greater the people's capacity to remember them. There are preachers who make it a point to have only one idea in a homily and to develop just that.

But one need not always be tied to the readings. On certain occasions one may judge it best to focus on the mystery of faith celebrated. For instance on the day of celebration of the solemnity of the Holy Trinity one might prefer to exploit the reach heritage of theology that explains this mystery, or even use some of the writings of the mystics to expound on his reflection. Similarly a pastor going out to a remote sub-parish where the faithful receive a priest only rarely might want to give them a more wholesome teaching that what is contained in the readings of the day. If it is baptism or matrimony he is celebrating he might want to explain more on the Church's understanding of these sacraments and how the promises made in them can be faithfully kept in the circumstances of these people's lives. Certainly if he can make use of the day's readings to explain this that is even better. But he need not preach exclusively on them.

²⁰ Cf. *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 67.

The length of the homily cannot be prescribed. The basic principle is that the homily should neither be too long so as to tire the congregation, nor too brief as to leave the message unexpounded. There is no specific time that can be fixed for all circumstances. A lot depends on the nature of the congregation, the ability of the preacher and the circumstances of the occasion. On average a homily should be around ten minutes, a few minutes less and a few minutes more depending on the occasion.

As regards the minister of preaching this is normally an ordained minister. Obviously there are many unordained ministers who could and even actually do give much better reflections than those that are ordained. Equally there are many of the ordained whose preaching leaves a lot to be desired. Still the requirement that unordained ministers can only preach during the liturgy with special permission is not unreasonable. To allow the ministry of expounding the word of God to everyone is to risk a lot of errors in that ministry and to suffer the consequences in the same way as many sects have found out to their detriment. In the context of Mass it is usually the presiding priest that gives the homily.²¹ But on occasion he may ask a concelebrant or an assisting deacon to give the homily or reflection.²² “It should be borne in mind that any previous norm that may have admitted non-ordained faithful to give the homily during the Eucharistic celebration is to be considered abrogated by the norm of canon 767 § 1. This practice is reprobated, so that it cannot be permitted to attain the force of custom. The prohibition of the admission of laypersons to preach within the Mass applies also to seminarians, students of theological disciplines, and those who have assumed the function of those known as ‘pastoral assistants’; nor is there to be any exception for any other kind of layperson or group, or community, or association.”²³

Does this mean that a congregation cannot benefit for the reflections or testimony of a lay person however edifying these may be? By no means; it only means that such reflections or testimonies must be so placed so as not to be confused with the homily. “If the need arises for the gathered faithful to be given instruction or testimony by a layperson in a Church concerning the Christian life, it is altogether preferable that this be done outside Mass. Nevertheless, for serious reasons it is permissible that this

²¹ GIRM, 42

²² *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 64.

²³ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 65-66.

type of instruction or testimony be given after the priest has proclaimed the Prayer after Communion. This should not become a regular practice, however. Furthermore, these instructions and testimonies should not be of such a nature that they could be confused with the homily, nor is it permissible to dispense with the homily on their account.”²⁴

All this accentuates the importance of the role of preaching and the seriousness with which those who are mandated to exercise it should carry it out.

*Silence*²⁵

The liturgy of the word should be celebrated in a way that favours meditation. Any kind of haste is to be totally avoided, for it impedes reflection. Any kind of haste is to be totally avoided, for it impedes recollection. Dialogue between God and his people, with the help of the Holy Spirit, requires short periods of silence, adjusted to the assembly, during which the heart opens to the word of God and a prayerful response takes shape.

Such moments of silence can be appropriately observed just before the commencement of the liturgy of the word, for example, after the first and second reading and after the homily.

*The Profession of Faith*²⁶

The Creed or Profession of Faith is recited at Mass when the rubrics prescribe it. The Creed offers the congregation the opportunity of assenting to the word of God heard in the readings and in the homily and of responding to it. It recalls to their mind, in a formula approved by the Church, the rule of faith, before they begin to celebrate in the Eucharist the mystery of faith.

The Creed is best understood in the context of its origin. Those were times of great controversy in matters of doctrine, times of the heresies, when the creeds were written. Before the celebration of the Eucharist (or before some other function for that matter, that required unity of faith), the members had to sort of undergo an examination to see whether they were

²⁴ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 74.

²⁵ GILM, 28

²⁶ GILM, 29

united in what they believed. One who believed otherwise would not in conscience dare to profess a Creed which he did not believe in. And so even where there is no controversy we need to pray the creed with consciousness of what we do, of the truths of our faith that are contained in it. That is why if a worshipping community decides to sing rather than recite the Creed, the music should be such that it fosters rather than hinder comprehension and prayer. “In holy Mass as well as in other celebrations of the Sacred Liturgy, no Creed or Profession of Faith is to be introduced which is not found in the duly approved liturgical books”²⁷

*The General Intercessions or Prayers of the Faithful*²⁸

The purpose of the General Intercessions is that the people exercise their priestly ministry towards all mankind. Secondly they express their needs and the needs of their community to God in the light of what has been heard both in the readings and in the homily.

To be truly “prayers of the faithful” it is meaningful that the intercessions are formulated by the people themselves. However, the minister may judge that under the circumstances this might be disorderly or contain too many repetitions, or prolong the service more than necessary. It is not uncommon in certain areas to hear a prayer that does not truly reflect a Christian attitude, such as praying for a certain political candidate that he may be elected in a community where there are people who support a different candidate. Due to such and similar reasons, the minister or liturgical committee may prefer that the intercessions be prepared before hand and edited if necessary. Even when they are read out to the people, the people make them their own by singing or reciting together the response.

Some communities may also prefer to use published intercessions. These have the advantage of being organised and formulated in such a way the embrace the needs of the universal Church and that they take into account the particular ministry celebrated. However, ready-made intercessions may not fully cater for the needs of the local Church. Moreover they reduce the people’s active participation. There are in a sense comparable to artificial flowers: convenient but encouragement a sense of “liturgical laziness”.

²⁷ *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 69.

²⁸ GILM, 30 GIRM, 45.

The intercessions are directed by the celebrant himself who gives the beginning and conclusion. A deacon, another minister or some of the faithful may then take the intercessions. The response is not meant to be said at the introduction and the conclusion of the priest. Sometimes the presiding minister may, after the introduction give one or two intercessions, and then invite the people to add more.

Ideally intercessions should be spontaneous. However, a certain format is suggested to show the people the “proper procedure”, in order to include the needs of the Church, of civil society, for those oppressed by any kind of need, and for the particular community. This checks the tendency to focus on local needs alone. It also a catechesis in Christian charity that looks to the needs of the other first. But this suggested format and order should not stifle the spirit of spontaneity. It only helps the faithful to appreciate that Mass has universal benefit.

MINISTERS

LOCAL ORDINARIES

“When they exercise their teaching role, bishops should proclaim the gospel of Christ to men. This is one of the principal duties of bishops...”²⁹ It is part of the duties of the local Ordinary as minister of the Gospel to appoint and institute other ministers of the word; namely: fellow bishops, priests and deacons through ordination; as well as lectors and lay readers and preachers. The bishop has the prerogative to take over the liturgy of the word even in Masses where he is not the presider.³⁰

PRESIDER³¹

The presider at the liturgy of the word can be a bishop, priest or deacon, or even a lay leader duly appointed for the task. The person presiding at the liturgy of the word communicates to the faithful, especially in the homily, the hidden nourishment which it contains. Although himself a listener when others are proclaiming the word, he is the one with the primary responsibility for its proclamation. Personally, or with the help of others, he ensures the proper proclamation of God’s word. He normally

²⁹ *Christus Dominus*, no. 12.

³⁰ CB, 171-186.

³¹ GILM, 38-43.

reserves to himself the interjection of comments aimed at ensuring more attentive listening by the congregation. In particular, he reserves to himself the preaching of the homily, whose object it is to help them understand the word of God more fully.

The first requirement in the person who is to preside over the celebration is that he be thoroughly familiar with the structure of the order of readings, so as to be able to elicit an effective response to them in the hearts of the faithful. Further, by dint of prayer and study, he should acquire a full understanding of the harmony and interconnection between the different texts of the liturgy of the word, so as to inculcate, from the order of readings, a correct understanding of the mystery of Christ and of his saving word.

The person presiding should freely avail himself of the choices offered in the Lectionary with regard to readings, responses, responsorial psalms and gospel acclamations, but in agreement with all those involved and in consultation with the faithful on what pertains to them.

The person presiding also exercises his proper office and the ministry of the word of God when he preaches the homily. By its means he leads his brothers and sisters to the sacred Scriptures, to know and savour them, he evokes gratitude in their hearts for the wonderful works of God, he nourishes their faith in the word which in the celebration becomes a sacrament by the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, he prepares them for the fruitful reception of communion and invites them to accept the responsibilities of the Christian life.

At times the person presiding has the task of introducing the readings beforehand to the faithful. These introductions can certainly help the congregation to hear the word of God better, since they are productive of faith and of good will. The person presiding may have this task done by others, such as the deacon or commentator.

The person presiding leads the faithful into the Eucharistic liturgy as he directs the general intercessions, utilising the introduction to them and the concluding prayer to connect them, if possible, with that day's readings and homily.

THE PRIEST

Specifically the priest normally reads the gospel reading in the absence of a deacon. Usually when there are concelebrating priests one of them takes the role of deacon in reading the gospel. But besides reading and preaching, and carrying out all the roles that belong to the presider mentioned above, a pastor also has the duty of preparing the other minister of the word. He may be involved in the selection and practice of readers. This can be a particular challenge where the priest himself is not a good reader. He must be firm enough to exclude those who are not capable of this ministry. He also has to guide those who conduct the liturgy of the word outside of Mass, such as Bible services.

The pastor should also see to it that the celebration of the Liturgy of the Word is done with appropriate honour. This includes the buying of liturgically worthy lectionaries, provision of covers for ceremonial lectionaries, provision of worthy lecterns, procession candles, incense, etc; provision of missalettes, where this is affordable and practical.

THE DEACON³²

It is for the deacon to proclaim the gospel in the liturgy of the word at Mass and sometimes, when appropriate, to give the homily. It is also for him to propose to the people the intentions for the general intercessions. The deacon also acts in his own right as an ordinary minister of the word when he administers sacraments and other rites.

THE LECTOR (READER)

The reader has his own particular functions in the Mass and it is he who should fulfil them even though ministers of higher rank may be present.³³ Commissioned readers should perform their task on Sundays and major feasts at least, especially at the principal Mass. They may also be given the task of helping to plan the liturgy of the word and, so far as it is necessary, of seeing to the preparation of others of the faithful who are asked to read at Mass from time to time.

³² GILM, 50.

³³ GIRM, 55.

Readers, whether commissioned or not, are required in the liturgical assembly. Arrangement should therefore be made to have qualified lay persons trained for this ministry. When there is more than one reading it is better to assign them to different readers than to have them all read by one person.

At a Mass without a deacon, the task of announcing the intentions for the general intercessions is to be assigned to the cantor, especially if they are to be sung, to a reader or to another person. Official readers, like the ministers mentioned above should wear the appropriate vestments when they go to read.

The qualities of a good reading include being articulate, loud, not too fast nor too slow, proper tone of voice according to genre of the reading and knowledge of the word read, avoiding. The ability to sing is an additional quality.

PSALMIST

The Responsorial Psalm need not always be taken by the one who takes the first reading. Another minister capable of singing may take it. “It is for the psalmist, or the cantor of the psalm, to sing responsorially or directly the psalm or other biblical chant, the gradual and ‘Alleluia’ and verse. If the psalmist’s task is to be properly carried out, it will be found very helpful if in each ecclesial community there be lay persons who are able to sing and to speak and pronounce properly.”³⁴

COMMENTATOR

Commentators exercise a true liturgical ministry when they give to the assembly of the faithful, from an appropriate location in front of the people, relevant explanations and introductions which are clear, short, simple and carefully prepared. Normally, they should be written and should be approved beforehand by the celebrant.³⁵

³⁴ GILM, 56.

³⁵ GILM, 57; GIRM 68a.

ALL THE FAITHFUL³⁶

The most important thing with regard to the celebration of the word of God in the liturgy is to listen to it, reflect on it and afterwards act on it. All the other roles mentioned above serve this one purpose and they serve their purpose or fail to do so to the extent that they achieve this or not. This listening is not the role of any one category, but of all those taking part at the liturgy including the ministers.

Thus all the faithful ought to pay attention to what they hear read. Whenever it is possible it is useful for them to go through the readings ahead of celebration of the liturgy. The habitual and regular reading of the scriptures makes the pericopes become familiar. They are all bound to conform their life to the message they listen to. Only in that way can the word of God be given a chance to transform their lives; only then can it be said to nourish their souls.

The lay faithful do well to encourage their ministers in this ministry of the word. It is good to encourage a preacher when he does well. Even the saintly are not immune to the caress of genuine praise. One can also kindly point out to a reader or preacher when he is not loud enough. The faithful can also contribute to the buying of missalettes, and anything else regarding the word of God. Those who can acquire a personal lectionary also are encouraged. The congregation must also be encouraged to attend the entire Mass from beginning to end, and avoid the habit of coming after the readings have been read. “The very close connection between the liturgy of the word and the Eucharistic liturgy should persuade the faithful to be present from the very beginning of the celebration...”³⁷

GENERAL PLAN OF THE ORDER OF READINGS FOR MASS

PASTORAL PURPOSE OF THE ORDER OF READINGS FOR MASS³⁸

The primary objective in the preparation of the Order of Readings in the Lectionary of the Roman Missal was pastoral, after the mind of the Second Vatican Council. To achieve this aim, the principles on which the new Order is based and indeed the very collection of texts which it contains

³⁶ Including all the ministers mentioned above. GILM, 44-48

³⁷ GILM, 48.

³⁸ GILM, 58-63.

have been examined and refined again and again with the collaboration of numerous experts in exegesis, liturgy, catechetics and pastoral matters from all parts of the world. The Order of Readings is the fruit of their combined effort.

What was visualised in this revision was the compilation and production of a single, well-stocked and ample Order of Readings, wholly in conformity with the intention and directives of the Second Council of the Vatican and which at the same time would be suited to the requirements and usage of particular Churches and worshipping communities. For this reason, those entrusted with the work of revision were at pains to safeguard the liturgical tradition of the Roman rite, while esteeming highly all systems of selection, arrangement and employment of biblical readings in other liturgical families and in some particular Churches. They used what experience had shown to be worthwhile and at the same time endeavoured to avoid certain defects found in the earlier tradition.

The present Order of Readings at Mass offers to the faithful knowledge of the whole of God's word, appropriately arranged. The selection and arrangement of readings through the liturgical year, but especially during Paschal-time, Lent and Advent, are intended as an aid to the faithful gradually to acquire a more profound knowledge of the faith which they profess and of the history of salvation. The Order of Readings is thus seen to answer the needs and concerns of The Christian people.

Although a liturgical celebration is not of itself a form of catechesis, it does at the same time have a didactic element. This finds expression in the Lectionary of the Roman Missal, which can thus be justly regarded as a catechetical teaching aid.

The Order of Readings for Mass offers an appropriate scriptural presentation of the most important of all that was done and said in the history of salvation. In its many movements and events, that history is itself successfully called to mind in the liturgy of the word. And it is perceived by believers to be continued here and now in the representation of the paschal mystery of Christ in the celebration of the Eucharist.

The pastoral advantage of having a single Order of Readings is that it enables all of the faithful who, for many reasons, might not always worship at the same assembly, to hear everywhere the same readings on certain days and at certain times and to meditate on their relevance to their own

situations. This applies to places where there is no priest and where a deacon or someone else has been delegated by the bishop to conduct a celebration of God's word.

On the other hand not all the faithful everywhere are tied down to the same message of scripture at the same time. Pastors may wish to offer a special response from God's word to problems of concern to their own congregations. While not forgetting that they are first and foremost heralds of the totality of the mystery of Christ and of the gospel, they may quite properly avail themselves of the options on offer in the Order of Readings at Mass especially at a ritual or votive Mass, or at a Mass in honour of saints or for various needs and occasions.

PRINCIPLES GOVERNING THE SELECTION OF THE READINGS³⁹

Three principles may be said to govern the selection of texts from the bible for use in the lectionary: the principle of "semi-continuity", the principle of harmony between the Old and the New Testaments, and the principle of selection according to them.

Semi-Continuous Reading

By "continuous reading" of biblical texts (*lectio continua*) is meant reading of a bible book - or the whole bible for that matter - from beginning to end. Obviously this is not in one sitting, and certainly not in one liturgical function. It means reading in such a way that one begins where one stopped the last time, until the whole text is read. Such was the practice of reading of the Jewish scriptures at liturgical functions among some of the Jewish communities. It was the way some monastic communities read the psalms in the celebration of the Liturgy of the Hours. The idea is to have an integral understanding and meditation on the word of God in its wholeness.

The difficulties with such an approach are apparent. In the first place the bible was not written as a continuous harmonious story. It is as it were a "library of books" sometimes describing completely different things, and having quite different literary genres. To read it continuously may not be any more edifying and to select particular passages. In fact one who makes

³⁹ GILM, 64-77.

a well-informed selection may actually portray a more harmonious message of the Scriptures. The other difficult concerns the sheer bulk of material to be gone through. To read the bible in such a fashion might require several years before one gets to the end of it. Moreover not all biblical texts have the same capacity to edify the faithful. Some are quite difficult to comprehend by the unschooled in the scriptures. Others contain rubrics that were intended for Levites and priests as guides in the execution of their liturgical duties.

And so a more reasonable use of the *lectio continua* is a semi-continuous reading: moving from beginning to end of a particular biblical book, while at the same time making a selection of the pastorally better passages for reading in the liturgy. This is what has been done in the use of this principle. The gospel is read in a semi-continuous fashion in much of the Ordinary Time, both on Sundays and during weekdays. The same applies to the epistles and the Old Testament readings during weekdays of Ordinary Time. On the first five Sundays of Lent the Old Testament for each of the three cycles trace in broad outline the key moments in the history of salvation up to the promise of the new covenant, and in a way they too could be regarded as read in a semi-continuous basis on a broader scale.

Typological Principle

The second principle is that of harmony between the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the present Order of Readings, the Old testament passages are chosen mainly because they harmonise with New Testament passages, with the gospel especially which are read at the same Mass. The principle is based on the belief that Christ is the fulfilment of what was promised in the Old Testament. However, care is taken that past abuses of this principal are not repeated, where the Old Testament was interpreted allegorically and made totally subservient to the New Testament. Such abuses led in the past to the counter-reaction of the Reformers who emphasised the Old Testament in its own right. To avoid such abuses the compilers of the present lectionary sought to make sure that “the best example of harmony between the Old and New Testaments is that suggested by Scripture itself, when, that is to say, the teaching and events

narrated in New Testament passages bear a more or less explicit relationship to the teaching and events of the Old Testament.”⁴⁰

Thematic Principle

A third principle is that of thematic choice. Here the readings are chosen with a particular theme or motif in view, be it a particular mystery celebrated on a specific day, or an entire liturgical season. It is with this principle in view that the General Introduction states: “Another kind of harmony is found between the readings at mass in Advent, Lent and Paschal-time, those seasons which have a particular importance and character.”⁴¹

Other principles of that have been followed in the selection and arrangement of readings are mentioned below:⁴²

Reservation of Books for Particular Liturgical Seasons

In the present Lectionary some books of the Bible are reserved for particular liturgical seasons, and this both because of the intrinsic importance of the subject matter and because of liturgical tradition. Thus, for example, the Western (Ambrosian and Hispanic) and Eastern tradition of reading Acts during Paschal-time is observed. This illustrates how the entire life of the Church began with the paschal mystery. Likewise, the Western and Eastern tradition of reading the gospel of John in the latter weeks of Lent and in paschal-time is also observed. The reading of Isaiah, especially First Isaiah, is traditionally assigned to Advent. Certain texts of the same book are read at Christmas time and the first epistle of John is also assigned to the same time”.

Length of Texts

A *via media* has been followed with regard to the length of texts. A distinction was made between narrative passages, which need to be of some length and are usually listened to attentively by the faithful, and passages of great doctrinal density, which should not be long.

⁴⁰ GILM; 67.

⁴¹ GILM, 67.

⁴² GILM, 74-77.

A longer and a shorter form of some lengthy passages has been provided, a task which was done with great care. An individual pastor may not take the liberty to abbreviate readings on his own that have no such provision.

Omission of More Difficult Texts

For pastoral reasons, genuinely more difficult biblical passages have been avoided in choosing the readings for Sundays and solemnities, whether they be objectively more difficult in that they pose difficult literary, critical or exegetical problems, or because to some extent it will be hard for the faithful to follow them. However, one may not hide the spiritual riches of certain passages from the faithful on the grounds that they will find them difficult, if in fact the source of the difficulty is the lack either of that Christian formation which no Christian should be without, or of that biblical formation which every pastor of souls should have. It frequently happens that light is thrown on a difficult reading by comparing it with another reading in the same Mass.

The Omission of Verses

It has been the custom in many liturgies, including the Roman liturgy, to omit some verses at times in Scripture readings. On the other hand, it must be admitted that such omissions ought not to be made lightly, lest violence be done to the meaning of the text or to the mind and the style of Scripture. However, in the compiling of the lectionary it was decided on pastoral grounds to continue the tradition, while taking care to preserve intact the essential meaning of the passages. Otherwise, some texts would have been too long; reading of considerable and sometimes of great spiritual value for the faithful would have had to be omitted because they contained one or other verse of little pastoral use or which posed really difficult problems.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE READINGS

Sundays and Feastdays

The lectionary for Sundays and Feast days has three cycles, with each cycle dedicated to one of the synoptic gospels. During cycle A the gospel of Matthew is read, in cycle B that of Mark is read, while in cycle C the gospel of Luke is read. The gospel of John does not a separate year for it is more

theological and doctrinal than pastorally oriented. Moreover to have a fourth cycle would have meant that there would not be enough relevant gospel pericopes to go round. Thus the gospel of John serves to cover the lacunae in the other three gospels, particularly that of Mark which is the shortest of the gospels. Parts of John's gospel are read during Advent, Christmas and Lent; and even during Ordinary Time in the year of Mark.

Besides the three cycles the lectionary for Sundays and feast days also has three readings allocated to each day. The gospel, the first reading (usually from the Old Testament) and the second reading. The previous lectionary had only to readings allocated to Sundays.

Weekdays

The week day lectionary has two cycles for Ordinary Time, namely cycle I and II. During the major seasons of Advent, Lent Easter there is only one cycle for the week day lectionary. In other words, the same readings are read each year for this period. During Ordinary time, cycle I is always identified by odd civil years, while cycle II is always identified by even civil years.

For the Lectionary for Weekdays there are two readings, the first reading and the gospel. The first reading is ordinarily taken either from the Old Testament or from the epistles. It may also be taken from the book of Apocalypse. During the Easter season it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, which describes the life of the early Church after Pentecost.⁴³ The Weekday Lectionary is parallel to that of Sundays and Feast days, yet some effort has been made to see that the two lectionaries complement. For instance while the Sunday lectionary is arranged in such a way that the synoptic gospels are read in the order in which they occur in the bible, the Weekday lectionary on the other hand has them read in reverse order.

⁴³ GILM, 74.

Table 1: Semi-continuous reading in the Weekdays of Ordinary Time

<i>Week</i>	<i>Year I</i>	<i>Year II</i>
1	Hebrews	1 Samuel
2	“	“
3	“	2 Samuel
4	“	2 Samuel; 1 Kings 1-16
5	Genesis 1-11	1 Kings 1-16
6	“	James
7	Sirach (Ecclesiasticus)	“
8	“	1 Peter; Jude
9	Tobit	2 Peter; Timothy
10	2Corinthian	1 Kings 17-22
11	“	1 Kings 17-22; 2 Kings
12	Genesis 12-50	2 Kings; Lamentations
13	“	Amos
14	“	Hosea; Isaiah
15	Exodus	Isaiah; Michea
16	“	Michea; Jeremiah
17	Exodus; Leviticus	Jeremiah
18	Numbers; Deuteronomy	Jeremiah; Nahum; Habac
19	Deuteronomy; Joshua	Ezekiel
20	Judges; Ruth	“
21	Thessalonians	2Thessalonians; 1 Corinthi
22	Thessalonians, Colossians	1 Corinthians
23	Colossians; Timothy	“
24	Timothy	“
25	Esdra; Haggai; Zecharaiah	Proverbs; Qoheleth (Ecclesi
26	Zecharaiah, Nehemia, Baruch	Job
27	Jonah; Malachi; Joel	Galatians
28	Romans	Galatians; Ephesians
29	“	Ephesians
30	“	“
31	“	Ephesians; Philippians
32	Wisdom	Titus; Philemon; 2 & 3 Jo
33	1 & 2 Maccabees	Apocalypse
34	Daniel	“

Readings for Saints' celebrations

The lectionary for the Saints follows the civil calendar, that is from January 1st to December 31st, and not like the Proper of seasons which begins towards the end of the civil year with the season of Advent. During the revision it was greatly pruned to exclude saints of a dubious history.⁴⁴

The Lectionary for saints has two main series of readings. The Propers and the Commons. "Proper" refers to those feasts that have their own readings. This is mainly with regard to solemnities and major feasts. Occasionally memorials may also have proper readings. This applies mainly where the saint commemorated is mentioned in the scriptures, such as Mary Magdalene, Titus, Timothy, and Martha.

"Commons" refers to those readings given in a series from which one may choose the most appropriate for the occasion for which they are provided. The less important feasts may be celebrated with these readings in accordance to the requirements of the Ordo. Common readings are grouped in categories such as "Martyrs", "Pastors", or the more general category for "Holy Men and Women".

Readings for ritual Masses⁴⁵

Ritual Masses are the celebration of sacraments and sacraments such as baptism, confirmation, matrimony, anointing of the sick; funerals; dedication of churches, consecration of virgins, blessing of abbots, etc. In the Ordo it is always indicated when ritual Masses may be celebrated and when they may not be celebrated.

Other Masses include Masses for various needs and occasions,⁴⁶ as well as Votive Masses. The latter are useful in meeting the needs of popular devotions. Normally when such Masses are celebrated the readings of the day are not replaced. Examples of votive Masses include the Mass for Our

⁴⁴ This does not mean that the holiness of such saints is put in question. It is simply that not enough facts about their lives has come down to us in order for the Church to set them out as an example for its members.

⁴⁵ SC 67, GIRM 310, 320, 329, 330, 334; GILM 8, 72

⁴⁶ GIRM 310, 326-334.

Lady celebrated on Saturdays, Mass of the Sacred Heart, of the Precious Blood, St. Joseph, etc. and finally there are also Masses for the dead.⁴⁷

PRINCIPLES TO BE OBSERVED IN USING THE ORDER OF READINGS⁴⁸

Options in Choosing Texts

The lectionary sometimes leaves it to the celebrant to choose between alternative texts, or from a number of texts proposed for the same reading. This rarely happens on Sundays, solemnities and feasts, lest the proper characteristics of a liturgical season be obscured, or the semi-continuous reading of a particular book be unduly interrupted. This option is more freely given for celebrations of saints, for ritual Masses, Masses for various needs and occasions, votive Masses and Masses for the dead.

The aim, in allowing such options is pastoral. In planning the liturgy of the word, therefore, the priest 'ought to consider the spiritual good of the people rather than his own preferences. He should remember also that the choice of the various parts can best be made in consultation with the ministers and servers who have roles to play in the celebration, and with members of the congregation as regards the parts which directly concern them.'⁴⁹

Possibility of Reading Two instead of three Readings

In Masses where three readings are assigned, all three ought to be read. However, if an Episcopal conference should decide, for pastoral reasons, that the readings should be reduced to two,⁵⁰ the choice between the first two readings should be made in a way that will not thwart the plan to instruct the faithful more fully in the mystery of salvation. Thus, the contrary is indicated, of the two readings, preference should be given to the one which best harmonises with the gospel, or to the one which, in keeping with the above-mentioned plan, is better suited to imparting a

⁴⁷ GIRM 308, 335-338; MCW 83; LMT 30-33.

⁴⁸ GILM, 78-91.

⁴⁹ GILM, 78; GIRM, 313.

⁵⁰ This is the case for instance in German and some French-speaking countries.

coherent catechesis over a period, or the one which makes possible the semi-continuous reading of a particular book.

Long and Short Versions of Texts

The selection of the longer or the shorter version of a text, where this is provided, should also be guided by pastoral criteria. The question to be asked is: which of the two can the faithful listen to with profit? Or if they can listen to the full text if it is explained subsequently in the homily? A pastor must avoid the easy tendency of taking the shorter version as a rule. On the other hand it is not correct to impose a longer version if people's attention will not be held throughout. One who opts for a shorter version may still refer in his homily the unread part on the longer version.

Choice between Two Alternative Readings

When a choice is offered between alternative texts, fixed or optional, consideration should be given to the needs of the participants: whether it be a matter of using a text which is simpler, or one which is more relevant to the congregation, or, as pastoral advantage may suggest, of repeating or replacing a text which is assigned as proper in one celebration and as optional in another.

A problem can arise when it is feared that a particular text will create difficulties for a particular congregation, or when a text has to be repeated after a few days - when a text assigned to a Sunday has to be read again during the following week. Given an alternative, the pastor may opt for one that removes this problem.

In parishes where a catechumenate is taking place gospel Readings of year A during Lent may substitute those of year B and C due to their particular suitability for Christian initiation.

Replacement of Weekday Readings

In using the Lectionary for weekdays one should see if one or other passage of a biblical book is due to be omitted in the course of the coming week because of the occurrence of some celebration. In that case, bearing in mind the plan of readings for the entire week, the priest should arrange to omit the less important passages or, if without them the over-all theme would not be clear, to combine them, suitably, with other readings.

On the other hand it is worthwhile to read through the readings of the week ahead of time, and check whether any might be repeated in the Sunday readings. In such a case, if pastoral advantage warrants it, one may replace the reading which repeats that of Sunday. Such readings can be replaced by readings of a votive Mass, or Mass of particular occasions, unless such a day is the celebration of a saint, in which case one could take the readings of the saint; from the Common where proper readings are not provided.

Choosing Readings for Celebration of Saints

Proper readings, even if provided on a memorial, must take the place of the weekday readings. Whenever such readings are provided on a memorial, this is expressly indicated in the Lectionary.

There are also “appropriated” readings, which illustrate a special aspect of the spiritual life or of the activities of a saint. In such cases, the use of those readings does not seem to be something to be insisted upon, except for compelling pastoral reasons. Mostly, references are given to readings in the Common in order to facilitate choice. But they are merely suggestions. Any other readings from the Common may be selected in place of an appropriated reading or a proposed reading from the Common.

Readings from the Proper or Common should always be used on solemnities and feasts. Proper readings are always assigned for solemnities and feasts of the General Roman Calendar.

Three readings should be assigned on solemnities of particular calendars, unless the conference of bishops has ruled that there should be only two readings. The first reading should be from the Old Testament (but from the Acts of the Apostles or the Apocalypse during Paschal time), the second from an apostle and the third from the gospel.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ORDER OF READINGS ACCORDING TO SELECTED LITURGICAL SEASONS⁵¹

ADVENT

With regard to Sundays the gospel readings of Advent focus on the Second coming (first Sunday), the prophecies of John the Baptist regarding the first coming (second and third Sunday), and on the events that immediately preceded the birth of Christ (fourth Sunday). The first readings focus on the Old Testament prophecies that predicted the coming of Christ. These are mainly taken from Isaiah. The second readings continue the theme of the Second Coming. They also centre on what we ought to do in preparation.

The weekdays can be divided into two series. The first group runs from the beginning of the season to 16th December, that is, the first three weeks. Here the first readings are taken from Isaiah and are read in a semi-continuous style. The gospels are chosen in conformity to the first readings, something that is an exception. From 17th to 24th December, during the fourth and last week, the gospels describe the events immediately preceding the Incarnation. The first readings corroborate the gospel message.

The following tables are meant to indicate three things regarding the gospel readings of Advent: the central message of each pericope, the central message of each cycle and how this is presented using different readings for each of the years of the cycle, the progress from Sunday one to four which can roughly be described as: 1. Second coming, 2. John the Baptist part I, 3. John the Baptist part II, 4. First coming.⁵² The shaded areas of the readings indicate the verses which best reflect the spirit of the

⁵¹ GILM, 92-110. A more elaborate examination of the Lectionary has been made here with regard to the readings of Advent and the first five Sundays of Lent (excluding Holy Week) as a demonstration to the reader with what care the selection and arrangement of the readings in the lectionary have been made. The same could be made for the rest of the liturgical year, space allowing.

⁵²This is corroborated in the *General Introduction: OLM*, 93 where it is said that: "The gospels have their own themes: they refer to the Lord's coming at the end of time (first Sunday), to John the Baptist (second and third Sundays), to the events which immediately preceded our Lord's birth (fourth Sunday). The Old Testament readings are prophecies of the Messiah and of messianic times, especially from the book of Isaiah. The apostolic readings provide exhortations and proclamations in keeping with the different Advent themes."

season and probably constitute the main reason why these particular pericopes were chosen for the season.

First Sunday: Year A, B, C.

Table 2 First Sunday of Advent - Gospel Reading

Year A

Matthew 24: 37-44

37 For as the days of Noah were, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. 38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark, 39 and they knew nothing until the flood came and swept them all away, so too will be the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Then two will be in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. 41 Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken and one will be left.

42 Keep awake therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

43 But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. 44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour.

Year B

Mark 13: 33-37

33 Beware, keep alert; for you do not know when the time will come.

34 It is like a man going on a journey, when he leaves home and puts his slaves in charge, each with his work, and commands the doorkeeper to be on the watch.

35 Therefore, keep awake -- for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening, or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or at dawn, 36 or else he may find you asleep when he comes suddenly. 37 And what I say to you I say to all: Keep awake."

Year C

Luke 21: 25-28

25 "There will be signs in the moon, and the stars, and distress among nations, the roaring of the sea. 26 People will faint for the foreboding of what is coming to the world, for the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see 'the Son of Man' coming in a cloud with power and glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads because your redemption is near."

34 "Be on guard so that you are not weighed down with drunkenness and the weight of sleep, and that day catch you unawares."

35 like a trap. For it will come on all who live on the face of the earth.

36 Be alert at all times, for you do not know when the Son of Man will come. 37 Therefore, be ready, for the Son of Man will come at an unexpected hour. 38 And to stand before the

Second Sunday: Year A, B, C.

Table 3 Second Sunday of Advent - Gospel Reading

<i>Year A</i>	<i>Year B</i>	<i>Year C</i>
Matthew 3: 1-12	Mark 1-18 1	Luke 3
1 In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2 "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." 3 This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said, "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" 4 Now John wore clothing of camel's hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5 Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6 and they were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 7 But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? 8 Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9 Do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our ancestor'; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10 Even now the axe is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 11 "I baptise	The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. 2 As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; 3 the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,'" " 4 John the baptise appeared in the wilderness, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 5 And people from the whole Judean countryside and all the people of Jerusalem were going out to him, and were baptised by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. 6 Now John was clothed with camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist, and he ate locusts	1 In the fifth year of the reign of Tiberius, when Pilate was governor of Judea, and Pontius Pilate brother Philip ruler of Galilee, in the region of Trachonitis, and Herod the ruler of Abilene, the high priest Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zachary in the wilderness. He went into all the region about the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. 4 as it is written in the book of the prophet Isaiah: "The voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.'" 5 Every valley

you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire."

and wild honey. 7 He proclaimed, "The one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of his sandals. 8 I have baptised you with water; but he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit."

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Third Sunday: Year A, B, C.

Table 4 Third Sunday of Advent - Gospel Reading

Year A

Matthew 11: 2-11

2 When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing, he sent word by his disciples

3 and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or are we to wait for another?"

4 Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: 5 the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good news brought to them. 6 And blessed is anyone who takes no offence at me." 7 As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 What then did you go out to see? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who wear soft robes are in royal palaces. 9 What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.

Year B

John 1: 6-8; 19-28

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light.

19 This is the testimony given by John when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" 20 He confessed and did not deny it, but confessed, "I am not the Messiah." 21 And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the prophet?" He answered, "No." 22 Then they said to him, "Who are you? Let us have an answer for those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?"

23 He said, "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way of the Lord,'" as the prophet Isaiah said.

24 Now they had been sent from the Pharisees. 25 They asked him,

Year C

Luke 3: 1

10 And the crowd
"What then should
In reply he said
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share with anyone
none; and whoever
must do likewise."
collectors came to
and they asked him
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might be the Mess

16 John answered
by saying, "I bapt
water; but one w
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10 This is the one about whom it is written, 'See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you.'

11 Truly I tell you, among those born of women no one has arisen greater than John the Baptist; yet the least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.

"Why then are you baptising if you are neither the Messiah, nor Elijah, nor the prophet?"

26 John answered them, "I baptise with water. Among you stands one whom you do not know, 27 the one who is coming after me; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandal."

28 This took place in Bethany across the Jordan where John was baptising.

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18 So, with
exhortations,
the good news

Fourth Sunday: Year A, B, C.

Table 5 Fourth Sunday of Advent - Gospel Reading

Year A

Matthew 1: 18-25

18 Now the birth of Jesus the Messiah took place in this way.

When his mother Mary had been engaged to Joseph, but before they lived together, she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit. 19 Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to public disgrace, planned to dismiss her quietly. 20 But just when he had resolved to do this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife,

for the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21 She will bear a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

22 All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: 23 "Look, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall name him Emmanuel," which

Year B

Luke 1: 26-38

26 In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. 28 And he came to her and said, "Greetings, favoured one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was much perplexed by his words and pondered what sort of greeting this might be. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour with God.

31 And now, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus. 32 He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David. 33 He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end."

34 Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" 35 The angel said to her,

"The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God.

Year C

Luke

39 In Mary's case she went with a Judean to a hill country where she entered the house of Zechariah and greeted him. When she heard the greeting, she leaped in joy. And Elizabeth, filled with the Holy Spirit, exclaimed and cry,

"Blessed are you among women, blessed is your womb, why has this happened to you, the mother of my Lord?"

44 For as she heard the child in her womb leaped for joy.

means, "God is with us." 24 When Joseph awoke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; he took her as his wife,

36 And now, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren. 37 For nothing will be impossible with God." 38 Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." Then the angel departed from her.

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The gospel readings of the first Sunday clearly indicate that the attention is put on the Second Coming. By looking at the shaded verses one can see the central message of Advent intended by the selection of these readings for the first Sunday: an exhortation to be prepared for the coming of the Lord, because the moment of his coming is not known.

The second Sunday is dedicated to John the Baptist. The attention turns from the Second Coming at the end of time to the first coming, the Incarnation. John calls for preparation for this coming with repentance and, as a sign for it, acceptance of a baptism of repentance. Of course the similarity in the texts does not surprise, since these are corresponding pericopes of the synoptic gospels.

The third Sunday, like the second, is dedicated to John the Baptist, with the difference that while in the previous Sunday the pericopes are synoptic in this case they are not. Each of the three pericopes makes a development on the message of the Baptist. On this Sunday the three years of the cycle agree in referring to the person of John the Baptist, and in as far as there is a development on his message. But unlike on the previous Sunday they each develop differently. Year A: John in prison sends his disciples to Christ to inquire whether he is the awaited Messiah; Christ answers by pointing to his messianic deeds; he in turn affirms the person and mission of the Baptist to the people. Year B: John the Baptist answers his interlocutors and says who he is. He further mentions that the awaited is already among them even though they do not know him. Year C: different people ask John what they must do to live a life of repentance and he replies to them. The progress therefore in the message of each of the years respectively is: Year A: The Confirmation that Christ is the awaited, Year B: The affirmation that the awaited already exists, Year C: practical

suggestions on the concrete deeds to be done in preparation for the awaited.

The fourth Sunday is meant to present the events that come before the birth of Christ. For that reason the gospel of Mark has nothing to offer, since this gospel begins with the preaching of John the Baptist. Neither does the gospel of John contribute, for it too has no infant narratives. For the gospel readings of years B and C therefore recourse is made to the gospel of Luke.

Different aspects of the immediate events before Christ's birth are presented, depicting different nuances: in year A Joseph's perturbation over Mary's pregnancy and the subsequent explanation by the angel, year B: the angel's annunciation and Mary's assent to the message of the angel, C: the visit of Mary to Elizabeth and the inspired announcement of Elizabeth over Mary's divine motherhood. In the fourth Sunday the main idea is the mystery of the Incarnation: Christ Son of God and Son of Man, (Son of Mary). As Son of God he has no human father, but is conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit. As Son of man, his ancestry is traced to David.

However, to try to summarise the message of the readings is to impoverish it. There are so many aspects of it that provide endless resources for the homilist. Only what is considered basic and indispensable is treated here.

This panorama of the gospel readings shows both the aspect of progress from Sunday to Sunday of the Advent season, as well as the balance in the three years A, B, and C, such that the same basic message is given without repetition of the same reading. To consider the aspect of harmony between the readings of each individual Sunday it is necessary to have a look at the other two readings as well.⁵³

⁵³ Cf. Simon Peter Kyambadde, *The Catholic Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary in Ecumenical Perspective* (doctoral dissertation), p. 208ff.

LENT (EXCLUDING HOLY WEEK)

The proposed analysis of the readings takes the gospel and the Old Testament readings and for economy of space leaves out the epistles.⁵⁴ As a general background to quote the General Introduction to the Lectionary for Mass:

The accounts of the temptation and of the transfiguration of our Lord are retained (for all three years of the cycle) on the first and second Sundays respectively, using the three synoptics.

On the three subsequent Sundays, the gospel accounts of the Samaritan woman, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus have been restored in year A. Since these gospels are of major importance in the context of Christian initiation, they may also be used in year B and C, especially where there are catechumens. However, other texts are provided for years B and C: for year B, texts from John about the coming glorification of Christ through his cross and resurrection and for year C, texts from Luke about conversion...

The readings from the Old Testament are about the history of salvation, which is one of the themes of the Lenten catechesis. Every year a series of texts is read which present the main elements of salvation history from its beginning to the promise of the new covenant.⁵⁵

According to this number the three gospel readings of the first Sunday form a category of their own, for they all narrate the account of the Temptations. Likewise the second Sunday forms a category of its own. From then on the gospels of year A concentrate on a baptismal catechesis, using the traditional gospel pericopes from John. The gospels of year B concentrate on the preparation for Easter, those of C on repentance. The first readings offer a rough account of salvation history in the Old Testament. This key text (of the General Introduction, no. 97 quoted above) will guide the analysis that follows. Reference will be made again to the particular phrases in the text relevant to the readings studied.

⁵⁴ In order to see the role of the Second reading cf. Simon Peter Kyambadde, *The Catholic Lectionary and the Revised Common Lectionary in Ecumenical Perspective* (doctoral dissertation), p. 257.

⁵⁵ General Introduction: OLM, 97

Gospels

SUNDAY 1, YEAR A, B, C: THE TEMPTATIONS

Regarding the account of the temptations, its suitability to be placed on the first Sunday of Lent is fairly clear, both because it is in accord with this season of penance to have the example of the fasting of our Lord, and because the entire season of 40 days is patterned on the forty days which Christ spent in the desert. The shaded area indicates that part which does not strictly belong to the narrative of the Temptations.

Table 6 Gospel readings of Lent, Sunday 1

Year A	Year B	Year C
Matthew:4: 1-11	Mark 1: 12-15	Luke 4: 1-13
1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. 3 The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." 4 But he answered, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear	12 And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. 13 He was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.	1 Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness, 2 where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing at all during those days, and when they were over, he was famished. 3 The devil said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command this stone to become a loaf of bread." 4 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'One does not live by bread alone.'" 5 Then the devil led him up and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. 6 And the devil said to him, "To you I will give their glory and all this authority; for it has been given over to me, and I give it to anyone I please. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." 8 Jesus answered him, "It is written, 'Worship the

14 Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of

you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " 7 Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 8 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; 9 and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.' " 11 Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news."

Lord your God, and serve only him.' " 9 Then the devil took him to Jerusalem, and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, 10 for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you, to protect you,' 11 and 'On their hands they will bear you up, so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.' " 12 Jesus answered him, "It is said, 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.' " 13 When the devil had finished every test, he departed from him until an opportune time.

A comparison of the three accounts of the Temptation shows that Mark's account is lengthened to include the first proclamation, just because his narration of the Temptation would be too short - he does not elaborate on the nature of the temptations. The pericopes from the other two gospels (Matthew and Luke) cover the period between the baptism by John the Baptist and the end of the sojourn in the desert, while that of Mark is made to include also the early proclamation after Jesus' return from the desert.

However, at the same time this addition does not simply serve the purpose of lengthening an otherwise very short reading. The first proclamation of Jesus which is an invitation to repentance is in tune with the spirit of the season.

SUNDAY 2, YEAR A, B, C: THE TRANSFIGURATION

It must be admitted that the suitability of the gospel of the Transfiguration to the second Sunday of Lent - so much so that it has to appear on the same day in each of the three years - is not so obvious in comparison to

the account of the temptations on the first Sunday, or of the Passion on Palm Sunday, for instance. This is particularly so when one bears in mind that the event of the Transfiguration has a separate solemnity dedicated to it on the 6th of August.

This is not to deny that the episode of the Transfiguration has something to say to the season of Lent, and at this stage of the season. Christ appeared transfigured before his apostles in order to prepare them for the scandal of the cross, so that they would remember his divinity and strengthen their friends in the trial of faith. In the same way the Church in preparing for his passion and death locates here a reminder of his divinity. But, seen in the context of the modern worshiper, that reminder does not seem to be so urgent in view of the fact that his resurrection and divinity are elements well established in the faith of the Church. For that reason it would not seem compelling that this reading appear on the same occasion in the three years A, B and C, and yet be celebrated as a separate feast just a few months later.

Bonneau helps us to understand the placing of the three readings of the Transfiguration on the second Sunday of Lent. The readings of this Sunday, he suggests, must not be understood solely in the context of Lent, but of Lent and Easter season considered together. Describing the narratives of the first two Sundays - that of the Temptations and the one of the Transfiguration - he writes: "Together the two episodes function as an overture to the entire Lent-Easter cycle: the temptation conjures up Jesus' struggle against evil, sin, and death, while the transfiguration hints at Jesus' risen glory."⁵⁶

SUNDAYS 3, 4, 5, YEAR A: THE BAPTISMAL CATECHESIS

The gospel readings of Sundays are selected, following tradition, to be used in Christian initiation which is a major theme of Lent. Because of their catechetical importance, the General Introduction directs that where there is preparation of candidates for baptism, the gospel readings of year A may be used in place of the other years. Their catechetical value is considered so prominent that *The Order of Readings*, not satisfied with giving the

⁵⁶Bonneau, "The Sunday Lectionary," 56.

possibility of extending them from year A to the other two year, also includes them in the Weekday lectionary.⁵⁷

The three readings have something in common. Jesus uses something of the physical world to teach a fundamental truth of Christian life. From the example of ordinary water he teaches about the gift of the Spirit. From the miracles of opening the eyes of the blind and giving back earthly life, he teaches the Christian calling from the blindness of sin and promise of eternal life respectively. The lectionary selects these pericopes, not so much for the physical miracle, but for the spiritual message.

For this study use is made of the short versions of these pericopes as given in *The Order of Readings*, since the short versions are always cut in such a way that they contain the basic message intended in the pericope. The shaded verses highlight the main spiritual message in the reading, which is the reason for the choice of the reading for use in Christian initiation. These readings are portrayed in the table below.

Table 7 Gospel readings of Lent, year A, Sunday 3, 4, 5

<i>Sunday 3</i>	<i>Sunday 4</i>	<i>Sunday 5</i>
John 4: 5-15; 19b-26; 39a; 40-42	John: 9: 1; 6-9; 13-17; 34-38	John 11: 3-7; 17; 20-27; 33b 45
5 So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. 6 Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired out by his journey, was sitting by the well. It was about noon. 7 A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." 8 (His disciples had gone to the city to buy	1 As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. 6 When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, 7 saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came	3 So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." 4 But when Jesus heard it, he said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." 5 Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, 6 after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. 7

⁵⁷“Since the readings about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind and the raising of Lazarus are now read on Sundays, but only in year A (they are optional on the other years), provision has been made for their use on weekdays. At the beginning of the third, fourth and fifth weeks, optional Masses with these texts have been inserted and may be used in place of the readings of the day on any day of the respective week.” *General Introduction: OLM*, 98.

food.) 9 The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria?" (Jews do not share things in common with Samaritans.) 10

Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water."

11 The woman said to him, "Sir, you have no bucket, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? 12 Are you greater than our ancestor Jacob, who gave us the well, and with his sons and his flocks drank from it?" 13 Jesus said to her,

"Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here to draw water."

19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet. 20 Our

back able to see. 8 The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" 9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am the man."

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. 14 Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the mud and opened his eyes. 15 Then the Pharisees also began to ask him how he had received his sight. He said to them, "He put mud on my eyes. Then I washed, and now I see." 16 Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not observe the sabbath." But others said, "How

can a man who is a sinner perform such signs?" And they were divided. 17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "He is a prophet."

Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again."...

17 When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days...

20 When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. 21 Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, 26 and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.

Do you believe this?" 27 She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." ...

33b he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. 34 He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." 35 Jesus began

ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem." 21 Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. 22 You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him.

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." 25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

39a Many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony,

40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them; and he stayed there two days.

41 And many more believed because of his word. 42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer

34 They answered him, "You were born entirely in sins, and are you trying to teach us?" And they drove him out. 35 Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him, he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" 36 He

answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." 37 Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." 38 He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said, "I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind."

40 Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, "Surely we are not blind, are we?"

41 Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, 'We see,' your sin remains.

to weep. 36 So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" 37 But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?" 38 Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. 39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." 40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" 41 So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. 42 I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." 43 When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go." 45 Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.

because of what you said
that we believe, for we
have heard for ourselves,
and we know that this is
truly the Savior of the
world."

Here follows a look at these three readings in turn, to see how they are used for a baptismal catechesis.

The Samaritan woman (Jn 4: 5-42)

The theme of this reading, which indeed runs through the other readings of the day, is living water, as a symbol of the eternal life that Christ gives through baptism. Like the Samaritan woman those preparing for baptism are offered this life, given through the Spirit. On this Sunday the first "Scrutinies,"⁵⁸ of the newly "elect" are carried out.⁵⁹

The relevance of this reading to Christian initiation is expressed in the opening prayer of exorcism that is said over the catechumens during the. In this prayer water symbolises Christian life.

God our Father
You sent your Son to be our Saviour:
These men (and women) preparing for baptism
thirst for living water as did the Samaritan woman.
May the word of the Lord change their lives too
and help them to acknowledge the sins and weaknesses that
burden them...⁶⁰

The second prayer, the prayer which the priest says over the catechumens with his hands extended over them⁶¹ is almost entirely based on the

⁵⁸The intention of the "Scrutinies," is to free the newly 'elect' from sin and the devil, and to give them strength in Christ.. These take place during Mass on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. See rubrics in *The Sunday Missal*, 162.

⁵⁹'Election', that is the choice and admission of those judged worthy to receive the sacraments of Christian initiation. This takes place, properly, during Mass of the First Sunday of Lent. See rubrics in *The Sunday Missal*, 162.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 185.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 186.

episode of the Samaritan woman. It shows more clearly the interpretation of the story of the Samaritan woman, and its application to the present, that is, to Christian initiation. This dependence can be demonstrated by putting each phrase of the prayer against the verses from the gospel which inspire that phrase.

Table 8 Catechetical use of the story of the Samaritan woman in the Scrutinies

Lord Jesus,

You are the fountain we thirst for;

you are the teacher we seek;

you alone are the Holy One.

These chosen ones open their hearts honestly

to confess their failures and be forgiven.

In your love, free them from evil, restore their health, *satisfy their thirst*, and give them peace.

By the power of your name,

which we call upon in faith, *stay with them* and save them.

Command the spirit of evil to leave them,

for you have conquered that spirit by rising to life.

Show your chosen people the way of life in the Holy Spirit

that they may grow closer to the Father and worship him,

13 Jesus said to her, "Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, 14 but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life."

25 The woman said to him, "I know that Messiah is coming" (who is called Christ). "When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us." 26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

26 Jesus said to her, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you."

Jesus said to her, "You are right in saying, 'I have no husband'; 18 for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband. What you have said is true!" 19 The woman said to him, "Sir, I see that you are a prophet.

15 The woman said to him, "Sir, give me this water, *so that I may never be thirsty* or have to keep coming here to draw water."

40 So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to *stay with them*; and he stayed there two days

24 God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth."

23 But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks

for you are Lord for ever and ever.
Amen.

such as these to worship him.

42 They said to the woman, "It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that *this is truly the Savior of the world.*"

By means of this prayer, and the reading about the Samaritan woman, a catechesis is imparted to the neophytes whose main elements are the following: the Christian life is a seeking for eternal life which is like living water which one drinks and never thirsts, it is a search to be taught by the Word of God; it is a search for holiness from one who alone is holy. It requires the confession of one's sins and obtaining of forgiveness. After that it requires the abiding presence of Christ, and the reception of the Holy Spirit, in order to sustain the life attained. It is an insertion in a community of worshipers, whose worship is authentic when it is done in Spirit and in truth.

The man born blind (Jn 9: 1-41)

In order to adapt the story of the man born blind to a baptismal catechesis, the spiritual significance of the story is put forward, and not the fact of physical healing. If personal sins are compared to blindness, the original condition of sinfulness in which we are born is paralleled to the man born blind. And the healing of this man by Christ is symbolic of Baptism which frees from original sin. The faith of this man which was conditional to his healing is parallel to the faith required in the catechumens in order to receive the healing of baptism. Two other themes are drawn from this episode, that of truth and that of falsehood. Blindness is a symbol of falsehood caused by Satan, the principle of lies, while the gift of seeing is a symbol of truth brought about by faith in Christ. The stress is no longer on the attaining of physical sight, but of the Kingdom of God. All this is expressed in the opening prayer of the exorcism:⁶²

Father of mercy,
you helped the man born blind to believe in your Son
and through that faith to reach the light of your Kingdom.
Free your chosen ones from the falsehoods that surround and
blind them.

⁶² *Ibid.* 193.

Let truth be the foundation of their lives.
May they live in your light for ever...

The same spiritual significance of the prayer is expressed in the second prayer which is said with the hands imposed over the catechumens.⁶³ At the same time another element from the episode is added, the element of witness: in the same way as the man born blind fearlessly and candidly bore witness to Christ before the Pharisees, so also these are called to bear witness to the faith which they are about to receive. The witness of the man is best expressed in the longer version of the reading. Below is a selection from the reading, of the verses that express the witness of the cured man. The words expressing this witness are printed in italics.

9 Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." *He kept saying, "I am the man."...*

11 He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight."...

17 So they said again to the blind man, "What do you say about him? It was your eyes he opened." He said, "*He is a prophet.*"...

24 So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and they said to him, "Give glory to God! We know that this man is a sinner." 25 He answered, "*I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see.*"...

30 The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. 32 Ever since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind? 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing..."

The prayer of the Scrutinies, basing itself on this witness, asks that the same witness be borne by the new members of the Church. Below is the prayer, with the words that express the element of witness printed in bold.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 193.

Lord Jesus,
You are the true light that enlightens all men.
By the Spirit of truth,
free all who struggle under the yoke of the father of lies.
Arouse the good will of these men (and women)
whom you have chosen for your sacraments.
Grant them to enjoy your light
like the man whose sight you once restored,
and **inspire them to become fearless witnesses to the faith,**
for you are Lord for ever and ever.

The raising of Lazarus (John 11: 1-45)

As in the previous two gospels, the catechetical value of the story of the raising of Lazarus consists not in the physical, but the spiritual; not in the miracle of resuscitation to earthly life, but the symbolism of this for the resurrection to eternal life. The death considered is not so much that of the body as the death of the soul through sin. In the same way as Lazarus' return to life was in itself a witness of Christ's power to raise the dead to those who saw him, so also the reception of the Christian faith is a witness to the resurrection in which they believe. The first prayer makes no reference to the earthly raising of Lazarus, but concentrates only on the spiritual resurrection which that event pointed to.

Father of eternal life,
You are a God, not of the dead, but of the living:
you sent your Son to proclaim the good news of life,
to rescue men from the kingdom of death
and to lead them to resurrection.
Free these chosen people from the power of the evil spirit who
brings death.
May they receive new life from Christ
and bear witness to his resurrection.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 200.

The second prayer is even clearer in emphasising that the story of Lazarus is used for its symbolical value in relation to the resurrection to eternal life. In addition, it indicates that the eternal life which the candidates receive and which begins here, is nourished by Christ and the Holy Spirit, through the Sacraments and the gift of faith, hope and love.

Lord Jesus,
you raised Lazarus from death
as a sign that you had come to give men life in fullest measure.
Rescue from death all who seek life from your sacraments
and free them from the spirit of evil.
By your Holy Spirit fill them with life;
give them faith, hope and love
that they may live with you always
and come to share the glory of your resurrection,
for you are Lord for ever and ever. Amen.⁶⁵

SUNDAYS 3, 4, 5, YEAR B: PREPARATION FOR
EASTER

According to the *General Introduction* the gospels of these three Sundays are “about the coming glorification of Christ through his cross and resurrection.”⁶⁶ The shaded texts below show those verses that best bring out these aspects; the central verses according to the mind of those who chose these pericopes.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 200.

⁶⁶General Introduction: OLM; 97.

Table 9 Gospel readings of Lent Sundays 3,4,5; year B

Sunday 3 Jn 2: 13: 25	Sunday 4 Jn 3: 14-21	Sunday 5 Jn 12: 20-33
<p>13 The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 14 In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. 15 Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. 16 He told those who were selling the doves, "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." 18 The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?"</p> <p>19 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." 20 The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" 21 But he was speaking of the temple of his body. 22 After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they</p>	<p>14 And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, 15 that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.</p> <p>16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life. 17 "Indeed, God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Those who believe in him are not condemned; but those who do not believe are condemned already, because they have not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgement, that the light has come into the world, and people loved darkness rather than</p>	<p>20 Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. 21 They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, "Sir, we wish to see Jesus." 22 Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus. 23 Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. 26 Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor. 27 "Now my soul is troubled. And what should I say -- 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. 28 Father, glorify your name." Then a voice came from heaven, "I have glorified it,</p>

believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

23 When he was in Jerusalem during the Passover festival, many believed in his name because they saw the signs that he was doing. 24 But Jesus on his part would not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people 25 and needed no one to testify about anyone; for he himself knew what was in everyone.

light because their deeds were evil. 20 For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed. 21 But those who do what is true come to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that their deeds have been done in God."

and I will glorify it again." 29 The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, "An angel has spoken to him." 30 Jesus answered, "This voice has come for your sake, not for mine.

31 Now is the judgement of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. 32 And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself." 33 He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

The readings of these three Sundays indicate that Jesus went to his death very aware of what was going to happen and why. His death is no tragedy but victory, bringing salvation. He predicts his resurrection after three days using the image of the temple which is his own body and which he will reconstruct (third Sunday). He shows that his death on the cross is for the healing and salvation of many, and is a sign of God's great love for his people (fourth Sunday); this death, although it will end in a glorious resurrection, and although a manifestation of God's love bringing salvation to his people, is nonetheless a most painful thing before which his spirit is troubled and which he accepts by sheer power of will, in conformity to the will of the Father. Thus doing, he indicates the way to his followers. They too must achieve victory through the cross, like a grain of wheat that yields only after it dies (fifth Sunday).

SUNDAYS 3, 4, 5, YEAR C: CONVERSION

The readings of year C for these Sundays all focus on the theme of repentance, as is stated in the General Introduction. These are: "for year C,

texts from Luke about conversion..."⁶⁷ Parallel to the theme of conversion, is that of God's fatherly forgiveness which comes to receive the repentant son. Here too, the main features of the readings that bring out the message of conversion intended are shaded.

Table 10: Conversion and God's Mercy in the 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays of Lent year C.

Sunday 3	Sunday 4	Sunday 5
Luke 13: 1-9	Luke 15: 1-3; 11-32	John 8: 1-11
<p>1 At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. 2 He asked them, "Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were worse sinners than all other Galileans? 3 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish as they did. 4 Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower of Siloam fell on them -- do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others living in Jerusalem?</p>	<p>1 Now all the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to him. 2 And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 So he told them this parable 11 Then Jesus said, "There was a man who had two sons. 12 The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them. 13 A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. 14 When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. 15 So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. 16 He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. 17 But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! 18 I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; 19 I am no</p>	<p>1 while Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. 2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him and he sat down and began to teach them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery; and making her stand before all of them, 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. 5 Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?" 6 They said this to test him, so that they might have some charge</p>

⁶⁷Ibid.97.

5 No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all perish just as they did."

6 Then he told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7 So he said to the gardener, 'See here! For three years I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and still I find none. Cut it down! Why should it be wasting the soil?' 8 He replied, 'Sir, let it alone for one more year, until I dig around it and put manure on it.

9 If it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, you can cut it down.' "

longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."

' 20 So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. 21 Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' 22 But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe -- the best one -- and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. 23 And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; 24 for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. 25 "Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. 26 He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. 27 He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' 28 Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. 29 But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. 30 But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' 31 Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours.

32 But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.' "

to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once again he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders; and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, sir."

And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin again."

The misfortunes of others should evoke repentance in the hearts of those who would otherwise consider them worse than themselves. Repentance should be expressed in positive action (Sunday 3). God awaits with eager love those who return to him, willing to forget the past and to give them a new beginning in his fatherly love (fourth Sunday). Jesus does not just teach this good news of God’s mercy but actually shows it himself (fifth Sunday). The plan of the gospel readings of these first five Sundays of Lent can be expressed thus in a diagram.

Table 11: Pattern of Gospel readings for Sundays 1-5 of Lent

		Sun 1	Sun 2	Sun 3	Sun 4	Sun 5	
Year A	1st reading						H O L Y
	2n reading						
	Gospel	Temptation	Transfig.	Baptismal catechesis			
Year B	1st reading						W E K
	2n reading						
	Gospel	Temptation	Transfig.	Prep. For Passion death & Resurrec.			
Year C	1st reading						E E K
	2n reading						
	Gospel	Temptation	Transfig.	Penance and God’s Mercy			

First readings:

The semi-continuous reading of the Old Testament in Lent does not run through the three years, one after another. Rather each year is to be considered separately. It is stated in the General Introduction “Every year a series of texts is read which present the main elements of salvation

history from its beginning to the promise of the new covenant.”⁶⁸ The table below portrays this: how each group of readings concludes with God’s promise. This is in preparation for the events of Holy Week in which that promise is fulfilled through the passion, death and resurrection.

Table 12 Lectio continua reading of Old Testament on the first five Sundays of Lent

Year A	First Sunday: Second Sunday: Third Sunday: Fourth Sunday: Fifth Sunday:	Creation and fall The call of Abraham Water from the rock in the desert The anointing of David as king Promise of the restoration
Year B	First Sunday: Second Sunday: Third Sunday: Fourth Sunday: Fifth Sunday:	Flood and covenant Abraham’s sacrifice of his son The ten commandments Exile and destruction of the Temple Promise of the new covenant
Year C	First Sunday: Second Sunday: Third Sunday: Fourth Sunday: Fifth Sunday:	Retelling the deliverance from Egypt The covenant with Abraham The call of Moses The Passover celebrated in the Promised Land Promise of a new Exodus

The question is whether through this semi-continuous reading spread over 5 Sundays one can perceive a sense of continuity. It is true that each group of five pericopes is presented in chronological order according to its setting in the Bible. But it must be noted that only the major events of salvation history are presented. To examine the coherence in each of the three years one needs to come in contact with the actual text.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*97. In the first readings of the Sundays of Lent, one of the fundamental principles of organisation of *Ordo Lectionum Missae* is portrayed most clearly. About this West writes: “Fundamentally, the *Lectionary for Mass* relates Scripture mnemonically in two time frames, the one being synchronic and operating on a given Sunday or feast, the other being diachronic and extending across Sundays and feasts. For example, the Old Testament readings in Lent stands simultaneously in two mnemonic units, a diachronic one spanning the five Sundays in Lent and a synchronic one operating on its particular Sunday in Lent. This pattern, however, is not the case for all readings on every Sunday of the liturgical year...” West, *Scripture and Memory*, 12.

YEAR A

Table 13 Lectio-continua of Old Testament readings of Lent year A

	Genesis 2: 7-9; 3, 1-7
Sun 1	<p>7 then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. 8 And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. 9 Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.</p> <p>1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?'" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; 3 but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.' " 4 But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.</p>
Sun 2	<p>Genesis 12: 1-4a</p> <p>1 Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. 2 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." 4a So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him.</p>
Sun 3	<p>Exodus 17: 3-7</p> <p>3 But the people thirsted there for water; and the people complained against Moses and said, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and livestock with thirst?" 4 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me." 5 The LORD said to Moses, "Go on ahead of the people, and take some of the elders of Israel with you; take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 I will be standing there in front of you on the rock at Horeb. Strike the rock, and water will come out of it, so that the people may drink." Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel. 7 He called the place Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled and tested the LORD, saying, "Is the LORD among us</p>

	or not?"
Sun	1 Samuel 16: 1b; 6-7; 10-13a
4	<p>1b The LORD said to Samuel,.. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."</p> <p>6 When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the LORD." 7 But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart."</p> <p>10 Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen any of these." 11 Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." 12 He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The LORD said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." 13a Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward.</p>
Sun	Ezekiel 37: 12-14
5	<p>12 Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. 13 And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. 14 I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken and will act," says the LORD.</p>

The history of salvation which emerges from the Old Testament readings of year A, briefly stated, runs like this: In the beginning God created man and woman and set them in the Garden of Aden, giving them all they needed, as well as the command not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Through the instigation of Satan they disobeyed, bringing upon themselves and their descendants the curse of God. In his desire to save fallen mankind God chose Abraham to form, through him, a chosen nation as instrument of his salvation. In the course of the history of this chosen nation, there were moments of rebellion against God in times of trial. Out of this nation God established an earthly kingdom, the kingdom of David. Even when that kingdom disobeyed and was taken into exile, God promised to rescue them and restore his kingdom.

The first readings of these Sundays do not present a catechesis of the history of salvation. The texts left out make the story far too incomplete; one has to keep in mind that these readings will be heard at intervals of a week. The mind would require particular effort to follow the trend of thought. Moreover it is to be remembered that these readings are also paired with other readings with which they are meant to harmonise.

The proper way of looking at these readings is to focus on the reading of the 5th Sunday, which is the promise of the new covenant. Then the preceding readings are seen in that light, as a presentation of the main stages in the preparation of that covenant. Thus the fifth Sunday acts as a fulcrum, between the events of Holy Week, and the Sundays that precede it. It is as if to say that the definitive event of salvation prepared for since the beginning of human history is now to be fulfilled.

The significance of the arrangement of the first readings to the preacher is that to interpret any one of them correctly according to the spirit of the lectionary one has to know not only their relation to the other readings of the day, but also their relation to each other in all the Sundays of the season. To understand one, one must be acquainted with all of them; before beginning the first Sunday it is necessary to go through all of the Sundays as preparation.

YEAR B

The readings of year B present God as a God of the covenant. Each of the five readings presents a covenant between God and his people; the covenant between God and Noah, the covenant between God and Abraham, between God and his chosen nation, the covenant broken, with the inevitable consequence of punishment, but also with the promise of restoration, and the promise of a new covenant written on the hearts of the people.

The terms of the covenant are basically the same: obedience on the part of mankind and blessings on the part of God. Because of the obedience of Noah, God promises to refrain from punishing the world as he had done before; because of the obedience of Abraham, God promises to give him a multitude of descendants. The chosen people are given the ten commandments as a guarantee for the attainment of God's promises in the promised land. Their failure to keep these commandments ends in inevitable punishment, but after punishment comes forgiveness and the promise of restoration. The covenant promised through the prophecy of

Jeremiah points to a time yet to come, the time of the new and everlasting covenant of Christ.

Table 14 Lectio continua of Old Testament readings of Lent year B

Sun	Genesis 9: 8-15
1	<p>8 Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 9 "As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, 10 and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. 11 I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth." 12 God said, "This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: 13 I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. 14 When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, 15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.</p>
Sun	Genesis 22: 1-2; 9a; 10-13; 15-18
2	<p>1 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you."...</p> <p>9a When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order...</p> <p>10 Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. 11 But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, "Abraham, Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 12 He said, "Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me." 13 And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son...</p> <p>15 The angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven, 16 and said, "By myself I have sworn, says the LORD: Because you have done this, and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will indeed bless you, and I will make your offspring as numerous as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of their enemies, 18 and by your offspring shall all the nations of the earth gain blessing for themselves, because you have obeyed my voice."</p>
Sun	Exodus 20: 1-3; 7-8; 12-17

3	<p>1 Then God spoke all these words: 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; 3 you shall have no other gods before me...</p> <p>7 You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. 8 Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy...</p> <p>12 Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. 13 You shall not murder. 14 You shall not commit adultery. 15 You shall not steal. 16 You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. 17 You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.</p>
Sun 4	<p style="text-align: center;">2 Chronicles 36: 14-16; 19-23</p> <p>14 All the leading priests and the people also were exceedingly unfaithful, following all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of the LORD that he had consecrated in Jerusalem. 15 The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent persistently to them by his messengers, because he had compassion on his people and on his dwelling place; 16 but they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words, and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the LORD against his people became so great that there was no remedy...</p> <p>19 They burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious vessels. 20 He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, 21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfill seventy years. 22 In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, in fulfillment of the word of the LORD spoken by Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia so that he sent a herald throughout all his kingdom and also declared in a written edict: 23 "Thus says King Cyrus of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him! Let him go up."</p>
Sun 5	<p style="text-align: center;">Jeremiah 31: 31-34</p> <p>31 The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. 32 It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt -- a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. 34 No longer shall they teach one another, or say to each other,</p>

"Know the LORD," for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

YEAR C

A striking feature of the first readings of year C is that the usual chronological order followed in year A and B is here broken in the case of the first Sunday. The reading from Deuteronomy is made to come before that from Genesis. The reason for this is to be sought from the contents of the readings, and from the relation of the first reading to the other readings of each Sunday. Once again this is a reminder that the lectionary is not made following fixed and rigid rules of selection of the pericopes, but that the general rules can be changed when necessary.

When one reads the pericopes in their sequence then the logic of the arrangement emerges. The first Sunday presents an overall panorama, a summary of the entire history of God's chosen people, from the call of Abraham to the possession of the promised land. Then the next four Sundays narrate piece by piece the key events of this history, in its chronological order. Sunday two narrates the covenant with Abraham, a covenant in which he is told of the suffering which his people would go through in the land of Egypt; the third Sunday presents the call of Moses to rescue Israel from slavery; Sunday four narrates the end of that sojourn when the people no longer need the sustenance of Manna, but can partake of the fruits of the promised land. As in year A and B, the fifth Sunday of year C projects the history into the future, foretelling the new covenant, which is celebrated in Holy Week.

Table 15 Lectio-continua of Old Testament readings of Lent year C

Sun	Dt 26: 4-10
1	4 When the priest takes the basket from your hand and sets it down before the altar of the LORD your God, 5 you shall make this response before the LORD your God: "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous. 6 When the Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us, by imposing hard labor on us, 7 we cried to the LORD, the God of our ancestors; the LORD heard our voice and saw our affliction, our

	<p>toil, and our oppression. 8 The LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with a terrifying display of power, and with signs and wonders; 9 and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. 10 So now I bring the first of the fruit of the ground that you, O LORD, have given me." You shall set it down before the LORD your God and bow down before the LORD your God.</p>
Sun 2	<p>Gn 15: 5-12; 17-18</p> <p>5 The Lord brought Abram outside and said, "Look toward heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness. 7 Then he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you from Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess." 8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?" 9 He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." 10 He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. 11 And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. 12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him...</p> <p>17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18 On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates,</p>
Sun 3	<p>Ex 3: 1-8a, 13-15</p> <p>1 Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. 3 Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." 4 When the LORD saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." 5 Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." 6 He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. 7 Then the LORD said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, 8a and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey...</p> <p>13 But Moses said to God, "If I come to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your ancestors has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 14 God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I</p>

	AM." He said further, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'I AM has sent me to you.' " 15 God also said to Moses, "Thus you shall say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': This is my name forever, and this my title for all generations.
Sun 4	Jos 5: 9a: 10-12 9a The LORD said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." ...10 While the Israelites were camped in Gilgal they kept the passover in the evening on the fourteenth day of the month in the plains of Jericho. 11 On the day after the passover, on that very day, they ate the produce of the land, unleavened cakes and parched grain. 12 The manna ceased on the day they ate the produce of the land, and the Israelites no longer had manna; they ate the crops of the land of Canaan that year.
Sun 5	Is 43: 16-21 16 Thus says the LORD, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters, 17 who brings out chariot and horse, army and warrior; they lie down, they cannot rise, they are extinguished, quenched like a wick: 18 Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. 19 I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. 20 The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, 21 the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.

Thus we see that in the selection of the first readings for these first five Sundays the lectionary has succeeded both in giving basically the same story; a history of salvation that concludes with the promise of restoration, and at the same time it does this using different readings so that each year has its peculiarities, something new to teach the faithful.

The marvel is that while each of these series of readings (that is Year A, B and C) has a coherence of its own, a coherence that is made to correspond to the other two series so that the same basic message is given; at the same time each reading is made to harmonise with the other two readings of the Sunday; namely the second and the gospel reading. This would have been easier if the gospels of year A, B and C also shared the same kind of thematic logic among themselves. But they do not, as we have seen. For this reason the second reading is made to establish the harmony between the gospel and the Old Testament reading. To do this without the readings appearing manipulated, but in such a way that the message is authentically

the message of Scripture, only highlighted, required considerable skill. The next section considers the harmony between the three readings, and the instrumentality of the second reading in the creation of this harmony where this is necessary and/or possible.

The table below is a to be viewed in comparison with Table 11 on page 67, adding another element to the elaborate organisation of the readings of the Sundays of Lent.

Table 16: Lectio continua reading of the Old Testament in Lent, Sundays 1-5

		Sun 1	Sun 2	Sun 3	Sun 4	Sun 5	
Year A	<i>1st reading</i>	Key events of salvation history					H
	<i>2n reading</i>						O
	<i>Gospel</i>	Temptation	Transfig.	Baptismal	catechesis		L
Year B	<i>1st reading</i>	Key events of salvation history					Y
	<i>2n reading</i>						
	<i>Gospel</i>	Temptation	Transfig.	Prep. For	Passion	death &	W
Year C	<i>1st reading</i>	Key events of salvation history					E
	<i>2n reading</i>						E
	<i>Gospel</i>	Temptation	Transfig.	Penance and God's Mercy			K

The arrangement of the readings for the Christmas Season,⁶⁹ Holy Week and the Easter Triduum and Easter Season,⁷⁰ as well as for Ordinary Time⁷¹ are not described in this book.⁷²

⁶⁹ GILM, 95-96.

⁷⁰ GILM, 99-102.

⁷¹ GILM, 103-109.

⁷² GILM 65-69, 193-119.

HINTS ON PREACHING THE LECTIONARY⁷³

By way of conclusion of the study of the lectionary, a few hints are given below on how to make the Word of God meaningful to the people in the context of liturgical celebration. In other words: hints on homiletics.

The first thing is prayer. We need to know that in the ministry of God's word we can only do the sowing; only God can make the plant grow. Pray for the light to understand and explain well the message of God. Pray for the recipients to open their hearts that that message may take heart. Prayer should not only be made at the occasion of giving the homily. Rather, it should be part and parcel of the life of an effective preacher. Many have rightly said that you can tell a priest who prays and one who does not by the quality of their homilies. A background of habitual prayer enables one to preach with faith, with reverence to the mysteries of God, and with authority.

Secondly one needs to go through the readings several times. It is a useful practice to focus on the readings themselves before going to anything else. Read them over and over again, until they say something new to you. Some do this by trying to narrate the reading to themselves in their own words after they have read it. Or one may imagine that one were asked after he has read the reading: what does it say? One would then try to answer the question as fully as possible without reference to the reading from the text. If one can remember and is able to narrate the full message of the readings, then one is ready for the next step. Already at this stage a few ideas about the homily may have suggested themselves.

It is a useful practice for one to learn to preach to oneself before preaching to others. If your homily fails to say anything to any of your congregation at least let it say something to you. The reflection on the message of the reading can be turned into prayer. What does the reading say to me in my own life and circumstances? There is a very concise and practical method suggested by the Jesuits on how to turn the gospel of each day into prayer.⁷⁴ This can be extended to all the readings.

Right from the first moment of preparation it is good to keep a pen and a paper nearby. If any point is striking it is good to jot it down before one

⁷³ Paul Edwards, *The Practical Preacher: Handy Hints for Hesitant Homilist*, Collegeville: the Liturgical Press, 1994.

⁷⁴ www.jesuit.ie See also [Counselling.doc#Meditation](#)

forgets. Meditate on the message of the readings. See it in the light of your own life. Suppose you were challenged to act on those readings such that you do something positive in their light, or refrain from doing something, what would you do concretely? It is important that the homily says something to the preacher, even before it says anything to anyone else. If one does not convert any other person, at least let him be nourished by his own homily.

When one has a good idea already about the message of the readings of the day, then one can go on to consult the available homily aids such as commentaries homily suggestions. One can also expound on one's ideas at this stage by joining group discussions for the preparation of the Sunday homily. Some priests come together on an agreed day each week to discuss the readings of the next Sunday.

When one finally has enough ideas one should then put the homily into writing. It is good to do this even for those who do not need homily notes, or who use them only in outline during delivery. Writing makes the ideas more coherent in one's mind. It also helps one find the proper expressions. Again it facilitates further meditation on the homily, since when one writes one is slower than when one merely thinks. Besides one who has the practice of keeping a record of one's homilies may refer to them in future when needed. Finally one should preach to oneself - or to an empty room - the finished for two or three times.

This process is rather long and might sound unrealistic under pastoral circumstances with tight schedules. One may not follow every step in the case of a daily homily, in those places where preaching is done at every Mass. But it is good to do as much of what is described here as possible with regard to the Sunday readings, at least for the beginning. The time spent preparing for the homily is time well spent. Moreover the longer one continues preaching the less laborious the preparation.

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