

The Lectionary

Every year the life of Christ—from his birth to his death and rising—is celebrated through the cycle of the liturgical seasons. Each Sunday, we have the challenge of giving Jesus precedence in our lives through participation in the Eucharist and with a day of rest. We give thanks to him through the Eucharist and at this same celebration, in a privileged way, we learn more about him through the readings from the Bible, the Gospels in particular.

The entire Bible cannot be read over the course of a year at Sunday Eucharist so lectionaries are necessary. A lectionary, from the Latin verb *lectare* meaning “to read,” is a collection of selected readings from the Bible. Two systems arose—one for Sundays, the other for weekdays. The Sunday lectionary system is a three-year cycle focusing on a different gospel each year—Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B (as the gospel of Mark is short in relation to the other synoptic gospels passages from the gospel of John are often inserted) and Luke in Year C. The Weekday system is a two-year cycle of Years I and II consisting every year of semi-continuous readings from Mark, Matthew, and Luke. Selection criteria for the choice of biblical passages are 1. that gospel passages support the liturgical year, and 2. that as much as possible is heard of each gospel.

In order to demonstrate the choice of biblical passages for the lectionary it helps to keep in mind the cycle of the liturgical year, beginning in Advent and finishing with the Feast of Christ the King (see Diagram 1).

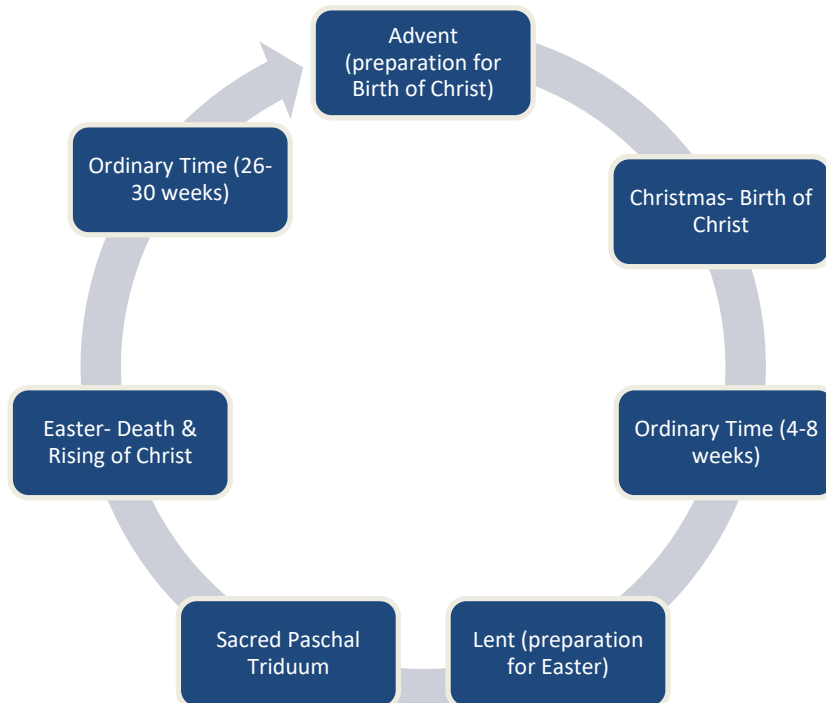


Diagram 1. Liturgical Cycle

Biblical passages which support the liturgical season of Advent are the narratives which tell of Joseph and Mary before the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:18-24; Mk 1:1-8; Lk 1:39-45). John the Baptist as a precursor to Jesus (Matt 3:1-12; Lk 3:1-6) is also introduced in Advent. Gospel passages on the birth

of Christ are read at Christmas. The teachings and deeds of Jesus are read in Ordinary Time. The Passion narratives are read in Holy Week.

The lectionary follows as much as possible the chronology of each gospel though the sequence is interrupted to celebrate the pivotal seasons of Christmas and Easter. The sequence of gospel readings is described as a semi-continuous pattern. Look at Diagram 2 and note how the gospel for the second Sunday is from John not Matthew. The first Sunday celebrates the Baptism of Christ and the start of his ministry in Galilee. The John gospel reading for the second Sunday develops ideas introduced on the first Sunday such as Jesus being the “the one who baptises in the Holy Spirit” not John (John 1:29-34) and that John the Baptist is not the Messiah or a prophet and hence the lesser of the two.

The readings from the 3rd to the 7th Sunday are continuous. The gospel of Matthew is generally considered to have a structure of six narrative sections alternating with five speech sections. Matthew organises Jesus’s teachings into five speech sections (Mark and Luke organise Jesus’ teaching material differently). The first speech section in Matthew is chapters 5–7 so from the 3rd to 7th Sunday this first Matthean section on Jesus’ teaching is heard uninterrupted.

SUNDAY	GOSPEL
Feast of Baptism of Lord-A begin Ordinary Time	Matt 3:3-17
2nd Sunday Ordinary Time- A	John 1:29-34
3rd Sunday Ordinary Time- A	Matt 4:12-23 (or 4:12-17)
4th Sunday Ordinary Time- A	Matt 5:1-12a
5th Sunday Ordinary Time- A	Matt 5:13-16
6th Sunday Ordinary Time- A	Matt 5:17-37
7th Sunday Ordinary Time- A	Matt 5:38-48

Diagram 2. Example of semi-continuous Readings

Accounts of the deeds and teachings or parables of Jesus that are common to Matthew, Mark and Luke are not repeated each year. Instead passages that are unique to an evangelist tend to be included in the Sunday Lectionary e.g., the story of “The Prodigal Son” (Lk 15:11-32) and “The Rich Man and Lazarus” (Lk 16:19-31), read on the 24th and 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time Year C.

On Sundays, the gospel readings are enhanced by two further readings—the first from the Old Testament (but Acts of the Apostles in Eastertide) and the second from the Pauline Letters and sometimes from non-Pauline letters. The structure for the Liturgy of the Word on Sundays and Major Feast Days is three readings, sometimes thought of five readings if the psalm with response and gospel acclamation are understood as readings (see Diagram 3). The psalm verses are chosen as a reflection on the first reading. The verse before the gospel is generally a key sentence from the gospel of the day.

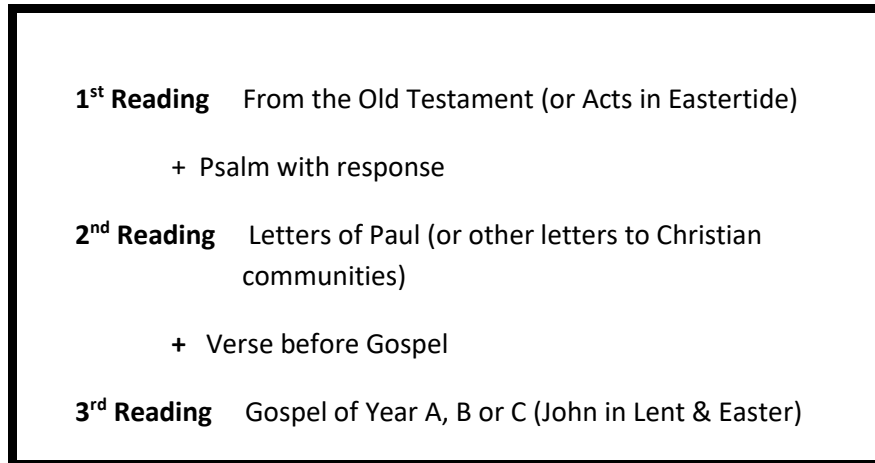


Diagram 3. Sunday Readings Pattern

For the Sunday lectionary Old Testament readings are chosen that have a correlation to the gospel though the thematic relationship between the Old Testament and gospel reading can be somewhat general. For example, the Old Testament passage for the 22nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Year A is from Jeremiah. The words of Jeremiah are deeply personal as we hear of him compelled by God to lay charges against the people of Israel, a message he finds very painful to deliver. Jeremiah is mocked and insulted by his people. On the same Sunday, the gospel passage from Matthew concerns the first foretelling by Jesus of his rejection, death and rising in Jerusalem. Placing the two texts side by side, Jeremiah is a prophet whereas Jesus is “Lord,” Jeremiah is suffering whereas Jesus’ suffering is forthcoming. General similarities between the two readings can be observed and the overarching theme described as “those who are called to serve God may suffer.” Diagram 4 shows correlations between the Old Testament and Gospel readings from the 22nd to 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time in the year of Matthew. Readings from the letters of Paul are not noted in Diagram 4 but they connect with the Old Testament and gospel readings. All three biblical readings support the liturgical season of Ordinary Time, a season when guidelines are presented for encouraging and maintaining order within the Christian community.

SUNDAY	1st READING	GOSPEL	CORRELATION
22nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A	Jeremiah 20:7-9 Prophet’s message is painful to speak	Matthew 16:21-27 First foretelling of Jesus’ suffering	God’s servants suffer
23rd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A	Ezekiel 33:7-9 Guard has responsibility to warn	Matthew 18:15-20 Rules for Christian community	Maintaining community order
24th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A	Sirach 27:30-28:7 Forgiveness counters resentment	Matthew 18:21-35 Parable on debt and forgiveness	On forgiving
25th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A	Isaiah 55:6-9 Prophet’s call is “Return to God”	Matthew 20: 1-16 Parable on Labourers and envy	God’s generosity

26nd Sunday Ordinary Time Year A	Ezekiel 18:25-28 Take responsibility for your actions	Matthew 21:28-32 Parable of 2 sons: action contra words	Action is better than words
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Diagram 4. Relationship between 1st Reading and the Gospel

Parishes generally have the lectionary in four volumes. One volume is the Lectionary for Sundays and Major Feast Days—containing all readings for all three years. Two Weekday lectionary volumes are required—one for Year I the other for Year II. The fourth volume contains readings for Ritual Masses, Common of Saints, Rituals, Masses for Various Needs & Occasions, votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead.

The current lectionary used for the Roman Catholic rite in Aotearoa New Zealand (ANZ) and also in other English-speaking countries is the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) of 1992. Most parishes in ANZ have lectionaries with translations from the Jerusalem Bible. However, some parishes use lectionaries published in Canada and the translations for that lectionary are from the New Revised Standard Version. This point needs to be made as vocabulary and formulation can vary between the two translations. To ensure you have the correct lectionary readings for ANZ purchase an ANZ liturgical calendar (eg *ORDO 2020* or *Daily Mass Calendar 2020*).

Recommended Resources on the RCL are:

http://www.commontexts.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/RCL_Introduction_Web.pdf

<http://catholic-resources.org/Lectionary/1998USL.htm>

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