

THE MASS AS THE BEGINNING OF HEAVEN ON EARTH - PART IV

THE INTRODUCTORY RITES AND THE SCRIPTURAL READINGS

I. In general, the introductory rites are meant to bring the people together to worship in company with the angels and saints and to prepare the people for the presence of God. See Matt. 18:20; 1 Cor 11:27-32. General Instruction of the Roman Missal 6.

A. The introductory rites are comprised of an entrance, a greeting, a penitential rite, the Gloria (on Sundays, solemnities and feast days) and the opening prayer, also called a collect. The idea in general is that, in order to receive the word and presence of God both worthily and fruitfully, we prepare ourselves for the occasion.

B. The entrance involves a procession and is accompanied by either a song or an antiphon for the day. It is natural to celebrate as one approaches the presence of God, see Col. 13:16. Such rejoicing with music brings the people together and helps drive out the temptation to evil. See Eph. 5:18-20; Acts 2:46.

1. In place of the songs, there may be an antiphon, which would be a quotation from Scripture that introduces the theme of the Mass.

2. The procession always includes the priest and any deacon, acolytes or others serving at the altar. It may also involve incense (expressing both the lifting up of prayers to God and the mystery of God), candles (reflecting joy at God's presence and Jesus as light of the world), the acolytes or other servers, and the lectors. The Book of the Gospels may also be carried in, reflecting the truth of God, which proclaims the personal Word of God, is coming to the people. See, e.g., John 1:9. There is a notion of the glory of God coming into the Church. See, e.g., 1 Kings 8:10; Ezek. 43:8-11; Matt 21:1-11.

3. Those in the procession genuflect toward the presence of Jesus in the tabernacle, or if there is no tabernacle in the church, bow toward the altar. The idea is to show the Son of Man the reverence due to Him, and, therefore, to have Him make us worthy to be in His presence. See, e.g., Rev. 1:17-19. 5:6-14.

4. When the priest and (if there is one) deacon, arrive at the altar, they kiss the altar, symbolizing the love between Christ and His Church. See, e.g., Luke 7:36-38 (the penitent woman kissing the feet of Jesus); Is. 6:1 (the magnificence of the throne of God); Dan. 7:9-10; Rev. 4:1, 11:1 (St. John seeing the magnificent throne of God in heaven); Eph. 3:2-3; Rev. 21:1-2, 9-10 (the Church as the Bride of Christ.)

5. The priest may also incense the altar, again dedicating the altar and creating an image of a cloud around it. See, e.g., Ex. 19:16-19, 40:34; Is. 6:4; Ez. 10:4-8:18-23; Dan. 7:13; Matt 17:5; Rev. 1:7.

C. The sign of the Cross places the priest and all the faithful in the presence of God. The phrase "In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit" was used by Christ in His commissioning of the disciples just before His ascension. See Matt 28:28. But the overall idea of the privilege of knowing God's name, and the power of that name is a common theme of Scripture. See, e.g., Ex. 20:7; 1 King 18:24; Ps. 72:17-19, 124:8; Matt. 6:9; Luke 10:17; John 14:13; Acts 3:6, 16, 4:12. "Amen" is an affirmation from the depths of one's soul. See 1 Chron. 16:36; Ps. 41:13, 72:19, 89:52, 106:48 (the psalms expressing the faith of the whole people), Rev. 5:14. Jesus would often use this affirmation, sometimes twice, to make a particularly important point. See, e.g., Matt. 5:18; Mark 13:30. And He is the "Amen" of God, the final affirmation of His power and love. Rev. 3:14.

D. There are three possible greetings, which reflect blessings used by early Christians and even by the angels.

1. The most traditional greeting is "The Lord be with you." This greeting reflects the angel Gabriel's words to Mary, as well as the angel's greeting to Gideon, see Judges 6:12, Luke 1:28. It was also used as a general blessing. See Ruth 2:4.

2. One current option is the greeting "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all" comes from the end of the second letter to the Corinthians, which is heavily a defense of St. Paul's ministry, as well as a description of the new covenant in Christ.

- The new translation will change the word "fellowship" to "communion," which better expresses the sacred unity that we have as a Church.

3. Another current option is the greeting "The grace and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you." This greeting comes from the beginnings of the letters to the Romans, Ephesians, Colossians, and both letters to the Corinthians.

- The new translation will be "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." That phrasing more accurately reflects the exact words St. Paul used.

4. The response "and also with you" or "and also with your spirit" both reflects a courteous response, see Ruth 2:4, and a desire that Jesus be with one in the height of one's life. See, e.g., 1 Thess. 5:23; Rev. 1:10. The spirit is the highest part of the soul. See Fabio Giardini, Prayer Without Ceasing (1998) 25-27.

- This response is only made to a priest and, occasionally to a deacon. As a result, some people have argued that the phrase "your spirit" refers to the Spirit conferred upon the cleric at ordination. See, e.g., John 14:16-17, 15:26-27, 16:13-15; 2 Tim. 1:13-14.

- In any case, the phrase "and also with your spirit" dates back to the earliest era of the Church, including the liturgical instructions of St. Hippolytus in the 3rd century.

E. The penitential rite is designed to ask God to make us more worthy to be in God's presence. The idea is that we repent of sins so that God may make us worthy to enter His presence. See Ps. 51:14; Luke 5:8-10; 14:11; 18:9-14; 1 John 1:19.

1. The priest introduces the penitential rite with one of three options, or words similar to them. Only the first of these options is in the Latin or the new translation.

a. The first option is currently: "My brothers (or brothers and sisters) to prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries, let us call to mind our sins." That version will be slightly retranslated to: "Brethren (or brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins, and so prepare ourselves to celebrate these sacred mysteries." The emphasis is that, if one acknowledges and repents of sins, one is more able to enter into the vision of the mysteries of God." See, e.g., Matt. 5:8; John 3:19-21. The reference to the Mass as "the sacred mysteries" reflects the fact that the Mass presents in visible form invisible realities that we partially understand, but not fully.

The glory and love of the Cross that the Mass re-presents is a mystery to the world, but revealed to the faithful. See, e.g., 1 Cor. 1:18-2:16, 15:51-57; Eph. 1:9-10, 3:1-13; Col 1:24-27. The Catechism, following Catholic tradition, thus refers to the liturgy and particular the sacraments as "The Celebration of the Christian mystery." See especially Catechism 1066-68.

b. The other options, although similar, are not included in the new translation because they are not in the original Latin. They are: "Coming together as God's family, with confidence let us ask the Father's forgiveness, for He is full of gentleness and compassion"; and "As we prepare to celebrate the mystery of Christ' love, let us acknowledge our failures and ask the Lord for His pardon and strength."

c. It also appears that the priest will be required to use the exact words, rather than similar words. However, the priest will still be able to preface them with a summary of the theme for the Mass.

2. For the actual penitential rite, there are three options: (1) the Confiteor; (2) the use of three tropes, which are followed by the phrase "Lord, have mercy"; and (3) a shorter and little used variant that has the conclusion "and grant us Your salvation."

3. The full Confiteor (which begins "I confess to Almighty God") expresses acknowledgment of sins and a desire for the prayers of all present, and the angels and saints for forgiveness. See 2 Macc 15:12-16; James 5:16; Heb. 12:1.

a. There is a comprehensiveness about the Confiteor, covering thoughts, words, deeds, commissions, and omissions and asking all on earth and in heaven for their prayers. The confession is first to God, but then to all others. See 1 Sam. 12:13; Ps. 32:5

b. The new translation will restore the threefold, "mea culpa" in the English words "my fault, my fault, my most grievous fault." This new phrasing reflects a common threefold repetition that emphasizes a point. See, e.g., John 21:15-17; Rev. 4:8. The reference to "fault" also excludes the idea of making excuses that one is not really responsible.

c. The new translation will also add the word "greatly" to the Confiteor. That word more accurately translates the Latin and again avoids downplaying the nature of sin.

4. The priest can also use three tropes, followed by the phrase and the people's response "Lord, have mercy." There are eight groups of three tropes in the Sacramentary, but the priest can also use similar words.
5. The phrase "Lord, have mercy, " which is either a part of the tropes said in the penitential rite, or said at the end of the penitential rite, invokes God's covenantal love for His people and willingness to forgive us so that our relationship with Him may be strengthened and continued. Ps. 51:3; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 17:13; 18:14, 38-39.
6. The priest ends this rite with an acclamation asking God's forgiveness and guidance to everlasting life. The current ending is "May Almighty God have mercy on us, forgive us our sins, and bring us to everlasting life." The new translation will be similar, "May Almighty God have mercy on us and lead us, with our sins forgiven, to everlasting life." This translation emphasizes more the need for forgiveness to continue on this pilgrimage towards everlasting life.
7. The penitential rite can be replaced by a sprinkling rite. The idea is to reflect the purification of the people, first in baptism and then further by repentance and the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist. See Ps. 51:3-4; Is. 1:18; Ex. 36:25; Zech. 13:1; Heb 10:22.

F. After the Penitential rite, the priest and people together say or sing the Gloria. This prayer is an ancient hymn of the Church that unites the Church throughout time and space, and invokes the angels to accompany us in praising God and entreating His favor. It reflects the great hymns of praise in the writings of St. Paul, St. John and the Book of Revelation. See, e.g., Eph. 1:2-10; Phil 2:6-11; Col. 1:15-20; 1 John 1:1-4; Rev. 11:17-18; 12:10-12. It is centered on Jesus, but has a Trinitarian theme, invoking God as Father first, then as Son, and finally as Holy Spirit.

1. The opening phrase, "Glory to God in the highest and peace to His people on earth" comes from the proclamation of the angels at the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:14. It also reflects the proclamation of the crowds as Jesus came into Jerusalem. See Luke 19:38. The new translation will follow the Latin more precisely, saying "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will." The actual words of the angels are "Glory to God in the highest and peace to those in whom He is well pleased (in Greek eudomia)." The Latin and the new translation are emphasizing that God's favor rests upon those of good will, both because they accept this grace and because the grace makes them even more of good will.

2. The Gloria invokes God as "heavenly king" the basis upon which all rightful power rests. See, e.g., Ps. 24:7-10; Dan. 7:9-12; 1 Tim. 1:17. But it then refers to Him as Almighty God and Father, Father both of the divine Son and of His people. The Old Testament several times refers to God as Father of His whole people, see Duet. 32:6, Hos. 11:3-8, Is, 63:15-16, Jer 31:9, 20, but Jesus reveals God as Father, both in a Trinitarian sense and as the loving Father of each person, although always in the context of His people. See, e.g., Matt. 6:9, 14-15; John 5:17-18, 10:30 14:6-14, 20:17; Rom. 8:14-18; 2 Cor. 1:3.

- The Gloria expresses the range of types of prayer, The current version uses three terms "we worship You, we give You thanks, we praise You for Your glory." In the Latin, and now in the new translation, uses five terms, saying, "We praise You, we bless You, we adore You, we glorify You, we give You thanks for Your great glory. The building of the types of worship reflects the way that the Bible describes the prayers of the saints in heaven. See, e.g., Rev. 7:12. The Catechism describes these types of prayer: (1) praise and glory recognize and celebrate God in Himself; (2) thanksgiving recognizes what God has done for us; (3) blessing God recognizes Him and the source of all good things, and by extension how all good things reflect His goodness; and (4) adoration involves the silent, joyful, humble reflection of our nothingness before the majesty of God.

3. The Gloria then turns to Jesus, referring to Him first as the only begotten Son of God.

a. The current text refers to Jesus as the "only Son of God." The idea is that God is Father to us by adoption, but to Jesus by original nature. See Heb. 1:1-14. Latin and the new translation makes the distinction clearer by emphasizes that Jesus is the "only begotten Son of God." A person begets a person at his level; thus God only begets another divine Person. We instead are adopted by the Father.

b. The Gloria then goes on to praise Jesus as Lord God, Lamb of God, and Son of God.

- The current text does not contain this second reference to Jesus as the Son of God, perhaps because the translators thought it redundant. However, the point that Jesus is truly God is so important that (as with the Creed later) it is worth repeating.

- The first and third titles affirm His divinity, with the middle one indicating His sacrificial offering for us,

fulfilling the symbolic role of the Paschal Lamb. See Luke 1:32; John 1:29, 36.

- We ask Jesus both to receive our prayer and have mercy on us. The idea is that we can approach God and offer Him our prayers efficaciously now that Jesus has reconciled us with God. See Romans 8:34.

c. The Gloria also refers to the saving power of Christ, currently saying, "You take away the sin of the world." The new translation will pluralize the word sin to sins, and so read "You take away the sins of the world." The Latin and the new translation's use of the plural emphasizes that Jesus cures, not only the original sin that damaged all of us, but also all individual sins.

d. The phrase, "You alone are the Holy One, You alone are the Lord, You alone are the Most High" will remain the same. It is taken from passages that indicate God's triumph over the forces oppressing His enemies. See Duet. 4:39; Ps. 83:19, 97:9; Dan. 3:45; Rev. 15:4. The notion is that God's forgiveness of His People's sins is the primary triumph, from which proceeds the worship of God and establishment of His reign. The liturgy also is often portrayed, especially in the Books of Psalms and Revelation as part of the triumph of God over His enemies. See, e.g., Ps. 149; Rev. 8:3-5.

4. The Gloria ends with a praise of Jesus as with the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father. Part of the idea is to express the inseparability of the Three Divine Persons. See, e.g., Luke 1:35; John 14:15-31, 15:26-16:14. This phrase "Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father" will not be changed in the new translation.

G. The opening prayer contains an invocation, a petition, and a conclusion.

1. This prayer is traditionally addressed to the Father through the Son, and in the Holy Spirit. General Instructions 54. It reflects the theme of the Mass or the week.

- There are three possible conclusions: (1) "We ask this (or We make this prayer) through our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever"; (2) "Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit one God forever and ever"; or (3) if the prayer is addressed to the Son, "You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God forever and ever.

The prayers express the fact that Jesus reigns alongside of the Father, see Ps. 110:1, a point that the prayers of the Book of Revelation makes clear. Rev. 4:11; 5:13, 7:10-11, 12:10.

3. The new translations apparently will be more faithful to the Latin and, as a result, include more words than the current translations. In the current translation, the words were often reduced to make the prayer easier to follow. The new translation will more follow the structure: (1) invoking God the Father by a title; (2) making a clear petition; and (3) a Trinitarian conclusion.

II. The Liturgy of the Word contains the readings from Scripture, the homily (recommended on weekdays, obligatory on Sundays and most solemnities), the Creed on Sundays and solemnities, and the prayers of the faithful.

A. Readings from Scripture and a reflection on the word of God goes back to the ancient Jewish synagogue liturgies. See, e.g., Luke 4:14-28; Acts 13:13-42. Likewise at Pentecost, St. Peter quoted Scripture (especially the prophets Isaiah and Joel) and then applied these words to the events at hand.

B. The Creed, which was developed in the first through fifth centuries, was added later to the Mass (in the 11th century in the Roman tradition) to reaffirm the common faith of the community. But this notion of worshiping with the common faith goes right back to early days. See, e.g., John 17:20-23; 1 Cor. 2:1-11; Gal. 1:8-9; Eph. 4:1-6; 2 Peter 2.

C. At the Last Supper, after giving His apostles instructions, Jesus offered prayers for them. See John 17. Early Christians offered intercessions for each other and the world right from the start. See Acts 2:42; St. Justin the Martyr, First Apologia 65-67.

D. Meditative silence is also an important part of the liturgy of the Word. Thus, for example, there is preferably a short time of silence before the readings, between them, and after the homily. The idea is that there should be time both to prepare for, and to reflect upon, the word of God. See Zech 2:17; Acts 15:12, Rev. 8:1. It is also a time to invoke the Holy Spirit to bring us to a fuller understanding of the words of Scripture. See Introduction to the Lectionary 9; John 14:14-15, 25-26, 16:5.

E. All of these parts form one act of worship. Vatican II Council, Sacrosanctum Concilium 56. As the proclaimed and written words of God prepared for the coming of Christ, the written word of God prepares the way at the Mass for the presence of

Christ in the Eucharist. See Is. 40:3; Heb. 1:1-2; Luke 4:21, 24::13-34; John 1:23.

III. The center of the Liturgy of the Word is the readings from Scripture. The homily, the Creed, and the prayers of the faithful bring these readings to completion.

A. On a Sunday Mass or a solemnity, there is a reading from the Old Testament, a responsorial psalm, and a "reading from the Apostles," i.e. the New Testament other than the Gospels. Then the Gospel reading brings the Liturgy of the Word to its high point. During weekday Masses, there is either a reading from the Old Testament or a reading from the Apostles, followed by a responsorial psalm leading up to the Gospel. Ritual Masses (e.g., weddings, funerals, Confirmation Masses) may have either arrangement.

- During the Easter Season (i.e. from Easter to Pentecost), there is a reading from the Acts of the Apostles and a reading from the one of the epistles of the New Testament on Sundays.

- The introduction to the Lectionary refers to a "reading from the Apostles" rather than a reading from the New Testament generally, both to distinguish the second reading from the Gospel reading and the Acts of the Apostles and to emphasize the point that all of the New Testament books must at least have had an association with the Apostles. See Vatican II Council, Dei Verbum 20.

B. The first and second readings (i.e. the Old Testament reading and the reading from the Apostles) begin with the phrase "A reading from the book of" The Gospel reading begins "a reading from the Gospel according to."

1. The idea is that each book of the Bible was written for a specific context. The Bible is actually a combination of different documents, all inspired by the same spirit.

2. But also, the readings are not meant to stand alone. They refer one back to the book from which they are read and to the other readings from that Book that will likely be read in the future.

C. The first readings end with "The word of the Lord." The idea is, not only are these readings inspired by God and therefore, above all other words, but also that the word of God is effective by its hearing. See, e.g., Jer 1:1-13; Is 55:10-11; Wis. 18:14-16; Eph. 6:17; Heb 4:12. Jesus Himself is the perfect Word of God. See, e.g., John 1:1-2; Rev. 19:11-16.

D. The Gospel can begin with incense, again representing the cloud of mystery that God's presence. E.g., Ex. 41:34-38; 1 Kings 8:10; Dan. 7:13; Matt. 17:1-8; Rev. 1:7 (representing the clouds around the divine presence at the Tent of Meeting, the Temple, the Transfiguration, and in the return of the Son of Man in glory.) The Word of God shines on in the darkness, bringing about the joyful acceptance of the saving message. To symbolize this fact, the Book of the Gospels can be brought forth surrounded by candles. See, e.g., Is. 9:1; Matt. 4:15, 5:15; John 1:9, 8:12; Rev. 1:12-13, 20.

E. If a priest is proclaiming the Gospel, he prays "Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips that I may worthily proclaim Your Gospel." (The new translation will be very similar, but following the Latin, it places the address "Almighty God," in the center.) Similarly, if a deacon is proclaiming the Gospel, the priest currently gives him the blessing "The Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may worthily proclaim His gospel in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The new translation will be similar, "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may proclaim His Gospel worthily and well in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

- In both cases, the idea is to purify the cleric so that he may more worthily deal in the sacred word of God, and that his life may be a better witness to the Gospel. See, e.g., Isaiah 6:7; Zech 3.

F. Before the Gospel reading, the "Alleluia" verse may be sung. This verse begins with the Alleluia, then quotes from Scripture, then repeats "Alleluia." Alleluia is a term of joyous praise in the presence of God. See, e.g., Ps. 150:1, 6; Rev. 19:1-6. Due to the penitential nature of Lent, the word "Alleluia" is replaced by one of four acclamations, e.g., "Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory."

The term "gospel" means the saving message of Jesus Christ. The term came from the Greek term "evangelion," meaning "good news." This term was used in the Septuagint (the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures used by the evangelists) primarily for good news about victory in battle, either past or future. See, e.g., 1 Sam. 18:19; 2 Kings 7:9; Isaiah 40:9, 52:7. In the New Testament, the term begins the Gospel according to Mark, as well as the message of John the Baptist. See Mark 1:1, 14; see also Matt. 4:23, 9:35; Luke 4:18, 7:22. The term "gospel" is especially used in Acts (16 times) and the letters of St. Paul (59 times) to mean the universal message of salvation through Jesus. See, e.g., Acts 5:42, 11:20; 14:7; Rom. 2:16, 1 Cor. 15:1, 2 Cor. 4:3. St. Paul contrasts the true Gospel with false gospels. See Gal. 1:8-9, 11; 2:2.

The Gospel reading then begins with a short dialogue.

1. As at the beginning of Mass, the priest or deacon says, "The Lord be with You." As with the beginning of Mass, this greeting reflects the joyful news that the angels have brought throughout history. See Judges 6:12, Luke 1:28.

Currently, the people respond, "and also with you." As with the beginning of Mass, that response will now be consistent with the Latin, "And also with your spirit."

Currently, the priest or deacon then says, "A reading from the Gospel according to [Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.]" With the new translation, the beginning will be "A reading from the holy Gospel according to . . ."

The implication is that there is one gospel proclaimed to all Christians. See, e.g., Gal. 1:6-9. Each of the evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) presents that same Gospel with a different perspective or emphasis.

At the end of the Gospel, there is again a short dialogue.

The priest or deacon proclaims again, "The Gospel of the Lord," a phrase that emphasizes again that the message comes from God Himself, not from any merely human source.

The people say, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." This notion of praise is the rightful and joyful response to God's saving power. In the Psalms alone there are about 125 references to praising the Lord, most commonly in the last five Psalms, which the Passover meal ends with. Perhaps most the most powerful reference to praise is the 22nd Psalm. Upon the Cross, Jesus quoted the opening of the Psalm, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" But, as the psalm continues, there is a great reversal as the Psalmist is raised and now brings all nations to God. The transition between the plea for help and the glorious restoration is in verse 23, which reads, "Then I will proclaim Your name in the assembly [in Greek ecclesia, which also means church]; in the community, I will praise You." Our praise to God recognizes that we are also saved from death, here by the merits of Christ.

The priest or deacon then kisses the Book of the Gospel (or if a bishop is the celebrant, the cleric brings him the book to reverence.) He says in low voice, "May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins." The new translation changes these words slightly to "Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away." The idea is that, by hearing the gospel, we are brought to the faith and repentance that heals our sins.

IV. The readings are structured to give a comprehensive overview of Sacred Scripture in an orderly way.

A. All of the books of the Bible except Obadiah, Zephaniah, and the Song of Songs are included at one time or another during the year. Zephaniah and the Song of Songs are used in ritual Masses and Masses for saints and special needs and occasions, especially with regard to the Church and consecrated life and marriage.

B. The Old Testament reading and the Responsorial Psalm are generally connected to the theme of the Gospels. The second reading is often connected as well, but for the sake of covering the books of the New Testament in a comprehensive and orderly fashion, that reading sometimes has less of a relationship to the others.

C. In general, the Sunday readings are divided into three years, years A, B, and C. Year A emphasizes the Gospel according to Matthew, year B the Gospel according to Mark, and year C the Gospel according to Luke. Readings from the Gospel according to John are placed in special locations during the year, especially during the seasons of Christmas, Lent, and the beginning of Ordinary Time. The weekday readings are divided into years 1 and 2. For both years, the Gospel readings are generally the same. The first reading and responsorial psalm change, and are designed to support the Gospel reading and to give a systematic presentation of each book.

D. During Advent, the readings focus on the preparation for the coming of Christ before He was born and our preparation for the return of Christ.

1. Thus, the Gospel readings for Sundays focus on preparing for the end of human time on the First Sunday, the proclamations of John the Baptist, and then the preparation for Jesus' birth.

2. The Old Testament readings for Sundays deal with the prophecies regarding the coming of the Messiah.

3. The New Testament readings are not in as continuous a fashion as they are during Ordinary Time. They are more

designed to support the Gospel message, especially with regard to carrying out the grace given through Christ and being prepared to meet Him again.

4. The weekday readings begin with a focus on the fulfillment of the prophecies of Isaiah, then continue onto the events surrounding the birth and public witness of John the Baptist, and finally in the last week onto the events preceding the birth of Jesus.

E. For the Christmas season, the Old Testament readings emphasize the prophecies about the Messiah, while the Gospel readings proceed from the infancy narratives to the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as described in the first chapter of John. The first three days after Christmas are the feasts of St. Stephen, St. John the Apostle and the Holy Innocents, reflecting both the sufferings of the innocent because of the hostility of the world and the witness of St. John to the Word becoming flesh. On a similar note, the weekday second readings are from the First Letter of John, which very much emphasizes the true humanity and divinity of Jesus. When there is not a special feast day, the Gospel readings deal with the childhood of Jesus, Jesus's first public appearances, as described in the Gospel according to John, and other events early on in Jesus' public ministry.

G. During Lent, the readings focus on the overcoming of sin and transformation into the glory of God.

1. Thus, the Gospel reading for the first two Sundays deal with the temptation of Jesus in the desert and His Transfiguration.

2. The next three readings during Year A (which can also be used in any year) deal with the Samaritan woman at the well, the cure of a man born blind (which is a symbol of the light of truth Jesus brings), and the raising of Lazarus. They are meant to focus on the triumph over the darkness of sin, of ignorance, and of death. The Gospel readings that can be used on those Sundays for years B and C deal with Jesus' prediction of His Crucifixion, death, and resurrection and with conversions.

3. The Old Testament readings for Sundays during Lent provide an overview of the history of salvation.

4. The daily readings for Lent cover the themes of repentance, conversion, and the need to join in the sufferings of

Christ so as to share in His glory.

5. During Holy Week, the Gospel readings describe the events immediately leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.

H. The readings for the Easter season reflect the Resurrection of Jesus, the Last Supper, and the growth of the Church at the beginning and until the end of time.

1. There can be up to seven readings before the Gospel at the Easter Vigil, including two from the New Testament that proclaim the Resurrection; there must be at least three, divided by Responsorial Psalms. The Gospel Readings are, of course, about resurrection appearances, with the Gospel featured in each year used for the Easter Vigil, and the Gospel according to John as the first option for Easter day.

2. The Gospel readings for the rest of the Easter season then describe the Resurrection appearances of Jesus and then the Last Supper discourse of Jesus, as described in the Gospel according to John. The Acts of the Apostles describes the growth of the Church, while the second reading is from either the first letter of Peter, the first letter of John, or the Book of Revelation for years A, B, and C respectively. Those letters tend to deal with our rightful conduct in living the life of Christ, Jesus as our Advocate and guide, and the triumphant Christ leading His faithful from heaven.

3. The weekdays Gospel readings begin with Resurrection appearances and then are taken from the Gospel according to John, especially with regard to the Last Supper.

I. During Ordinary Time, the readings begin with the Baptism of the Lord. The second Sunday focuses the beginning of Jesus' public ministry as described in the Gospel according to John. The Gospel readings then proceed through the synoptic Gospel for the year. However, in year B, the bread of life discourse in chapter 6 of the Gospel according to John, which focuses on the Eucharist, replaces the Gospel according to Mark for weeks sixteen through twenty.

1. The Old Testament reading for Sunday generally provides background for the Gospel reading. The second reading provides the highlights in a semi-continuous fashion from the letters of St. Paul and St. James. Each year begins with a reading from First Corinthians, which deals for the most part with the governance of the Church and Christian morals. Years A and C end with readings from First and Second Thessalonians, which give teachings regarding the resurrection of the dead, individual and together at the end of all things on earth. Year B ends with readings from the Letter to the

Hebrews chapters 1-10, which described the high and eternal priesthood of Jesus.

2. The Gospel readings for the weekdays in ordinary time proceeds first through the Gospel according to Mark, then through the Gospel according to Matthew, then through the Gospel according to Luke. The first readings are from a broad range of books in the Old and New Testaments.

- At the end of ordinary time, the readings from the Gospel according to Luke describe the eschatological discourse that Jesus gave near the end of His public ministry. See Luke 19:41-21:36. The first readings are either from the Books of Maccabees about the resurrection of the dead (for Year 1) or from the Book of Revelation (for Year 2.)

J. There are also a number of special days during the year, i.e. solemnities (e.g., Christmas, Epiphany, All Saints Day), feasts (e.g., days for the Apostles) are memorials (which are generally saints days.) Solemnities and feasts have their own readings to be used for Mass. There are also readings for the memorials. However, for the sake of preserving the continuity of the readings from Scripture during a week, the priest generally selects the regular weekday readings for a memorial. Introduction to the Lectionary 83. There are also special readings for ritual Masses, votive Masses and Masses for particular needs and occasions.