

PART TWO

Structure of the Order of Readings for Mass

Chapter IV

General Plan of the Readings for Mass

1. Pastoral Aim of the Order of Readings for Mass

58. On the basis of the intention of Vatican Council II, the Order of Readings provided by the Lectionary of the Roman Missal has been composed above all for a pastoral purpose. To achieve this aim, not only the principles underlying this new Order of Readings but also the lists of texts that it provides have been discussed and revised over and over again, with the cooperation of a great many experts in exegesis, pastoral studies, catechetics, and liturgy from all parts of the world. The Order of Readings is the fruit of this combined effort.

The prolonged use of this Order of Readings to proclaim and explain Sacred Scripture in the Eucharistic celebration will, it is hoped, prove to be an effective step towards achieving the objective stated repeatedly by Vatican Council II.⁹⁶

59. The decision on revising the Lectionary for Mass was to draw up and edit a single, rich, and full Order of Readings that would be in complete accord with the intent and prescriptions of the Council.⁹⁷ At the same time, however, the Order was meant to be of a kind that would meet the requirements and usages of particular Churches and liturgical assemblies. For this reason, those responsible for the revision took pains to safeguard the liturgical tradition of the Roman Rite, but valued highly the merits of all the systems of selecting, arranging, and using the biblical readings in other liturgical families and in certain particular Churches. The revisers made use of those elements that experience has confirmed, but with an effort to avoid certain shortcomings found in the preceding form of the tradition.
60. The present Order of Readings for Mass, then, is an arrangement of biblical readings that provides the faithful with a knowledge of the whole of God's Word, in a pattern suited to the purpose. Throughout the liturgical year, but above all during the seasons of Easter, Lent, and Advent, the choice and sequence of readings are aimed at giving the faithful an ever-deepening perception of the faith they profess and of the history of salvation.⁹⁸ Accordingly, the Order of Readings corresponds to the requirements and interests of the Christian people.

96 Cf. for example, Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*: 'All these things have been arranged in this way so as to arouse more and more among Christ's faithful that hunger for the Word of God by which, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the people of the New Covenant can be seen, as it were, to be impelled towards the perfect unity of the Church. We trust that given this arrangement both Priests and faithful may make more devout spiritual preparation for the Lord's Supper and that, meditating more deeply on Sacred Scripture, they will be nourished more abundantly each day by the words of the Lord. In consequence, in accord with the teachings of the Second Vatican Council, Sacred Scripture will be regarded by all as an abiding fountain of spiritual life, as the principal basis for the handing on of Christian doctrine, and finally as the core of all theological formation.' (in *The Roman Missal*).

97 Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 35 and 51.

98 Cf. Paul VI, Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum*: 'For by this means, the continuous process of the mystery of salvation is illustrated, as set forth in the revealed words of God.' (in *The Roman Missal*).

61. The celebration of the Liturgy is not in itself simply a form of catechesis, but it does contain an element of teaching. The Lectionary of the Roman Missal brings this out⁹⁹ and therefore deserves to be regarded as a pedagogical resource aiding catechesis.

This is so because the Order of Readings for Mass aptly presents from Scripture the principal deeds and words belonging to the history of salvation. As its many phases and events are recalled in the Liturgy of the Word, the faithful will come to see that the history of salvation is contained here and now in the representation of Christ's Paschal Mystery celebrated through the Eucharist.

62. The pastoral advantage of having in the Roman Rite a single Order of Readings for the Lectionary is obvious on other grounds. All the faithful, particularly those who for various reasons do not always take part in Mass with the same assembly, will everywhere be able to hear the same readings on any given day or in any liturgical season, and to reflect on the application of these readings to their own circumstances. This is the case even in places that have no Priest and where a Deacon or someone else deputed by the Bishop conducts a celebration of the Word of God.¹⁰⁰
63. Pastors may wish to respond specifically from the Word of God to the concerns of their own congregations. Although they must be mindful that they are above all to be the heralds of the entire mystery of Christ and the Gospel, they may rightfully use the options provided in the Order of Readings for Mass. This applies particularly to the celebration of a ritual or votive Mass, a Mass in honour of the Saints, or one of the Masses for Various Needs and Occasions. In the light of the general norms, special faculties are granted for the readings in Masses with particular groups.¹⁰¹

2. Principles used in drawing up the Order of Readings for Mass

64. To achieve the purpose of the Order of Readings for Mass, the parts have been selected and arranged in such a way as to take into account the sequence of the liturgical seasons and the hermeneutical principles discovered and formulated through contemporary biblical research.

It was judged helpful to state here the principles guiding the composition of the Order of Readings for Mass.

a. Selection of texts

65. The course of readings in the Proper of Time is arranged as follows. Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord present the more important biblical passages. In this way the more significant parts of God's revealed Word can be read to the assembly of the faithful within a reasonable period of time. Weekdays present a second series of texts from Scripture and in a sense these complement the message of salvation explained on Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord. But neither series in these main parts of the Order of Readings — the series for Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord and for weekdays — depends on the other. The Order of Readings for Sundays and the Solemnities

99 Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, nos. 9, 33. Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, 26 Sept. 1964, no. 7: AAS 56 (1964) 878. John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation *Catechesi tradendae*, 16 Oct. 1979, no. 23: AAS 71 (1979) 1296-1297.

100 Cf. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 35, 4. Congregation of Rites, Instruction *Inter Oecumenici*, 26 Sept 1964, nos. 37-38: AAS 56 (1964) 884.

101 Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship, Instruction *Actio pastoralis*, 15 May 1969, no. 6: AAS 61 (1969) 809; *Directory for Masses with Children* (1973; Eng. tr. 1973), nos. 41-47. Paul VI, Apostolic Exhortation *Marialis cultus*, 2 Feb. 1974, no. 12: AAS 66 (1974) 125-126.

of the Lord extends over three years; for weekdays, over two. Thus each runs its course independently of the other.

The course of readings in other parts of the Order of Readings is governed by its own rules. This applies to the series of readings for celebrations of the Saints, Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, or Masses for the Dead.

b. Arrangement of the readings for Sundays and Solemnities of the Lord

66. The following are features proper to the readings for Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord:

1. Each Mass has three readings: the first from the Old Testament, the second from an Apostle (that is, either from a letter or from Revelation, depending on the season), and the third from the Gospels. This arrangement brings out the unity of the Old and New Testaments and of the history of salvation, in which Christ is the central figure, commemorated in his Paschal Mystery.
2. A more varied and richer reading of Scripture on Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord results from the three-year cycle provided for these days, in that the same texts are read only every three years.¹⁰²
3. The principles governing the Order of Readings for Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord are called the principles of ‘harmony’ and of ‘semicontinuous reading.’ One or the other applies according to the different seasons of the year and the distinctive character of the particular liturgical season.

67. The best instance of harmony between the Old and New Testament readings occurs when it is one that Scripture itself suggests. This is the case when the teaching and events recounted in texts of the New Testament bear a more or less explicit relationship to the teaching and events of the Old Testament. The present Order of Readings selects Old Testament texts mainly because of their correlation with New Testament texts read in the same Mass and particularly with the Gospel text.

Harmony of another kind exists between texts of the readings for each Mass during Advent, Lent, and Easter, the seasons that have a distinctive importance or character.

In contrast, the Sundays in Ordinary Time do not have a distinctive character. Thus the texts of both the apostolic and Gospel readings are arranged in an order of semicontinuous reading, whereas the Old Testament reading is harmonised with the Gospel.

68. The decision was made not to extend to Sundays the arrangement suited to the liturgical seasons mentioned, that is, not to have an organic harmony of themes designed to aid homiletic instruction. Such an arrangement would be in conflict with the genuine conception of liturgical celebration. The Liturgy is always the celebration of the mystery of Christ and makes use of the Word of God on the basis of its own tradition, guided not

¹⁰² Each of the years is designated by a letter, A, B, or C. The following is the procedure to determine which year is A, B, or C. The letter C designates a year whose number is divisible into three equal parts, as though the cycle had taken its beginning from the first year of the Christian era. Thus the year 1 would have been Year A; year 2, Year B; year 3, Year C, (as would years 6, 9, and 12). Thus, for example, year 1980 is Year C; 1981, Year A; 1982, Year B; and 1983, Year C again. And so forth. Obviously each cycle runs in accord with the plan of the liturgical year, that is, it begins with the First Week of Advent, which falls in the preceding year of the civil calendar.

The distinguishing characteristic for the years in each cycle is based in a sense on the principal note of the Synoptic Gospel used for the semicontinuous reading of Ordinary Time. Thus the first Year of the cycle is the Year for the reading of the Gospel of Matthew and is so named; the second and third Years are the Year of Mark and the Year of Luke.

by merely logical or extrinsic concerns but by the desire to proclaim the Gospel and to lead those who believe to the fullness of truth.

c. Arrangement of the readings for weekdays

69. The weekday readings have been arranged in the following way:

1. Each Mass has two readings: the first is from the Old Testament or from an Apostle (from a letter or Revelation), and during the Easter season from Acts; the second, from the Gospels.
2. The yearly cycle for Lent has its proper principles of arrangement, which take into account the baptismal and penitential themes of this season.
3. The cycle for the weekdays of Advent, the Christmas season, and the Easter season is also yearly and the readings thus remain the same each year.
4. For the thirty-four weeks of Ordinary Time, the Gospel readings are arranged in a single cycle, repeated each year. But the First Reading is arranged in a two-year cycle and is thus read every other year. Year I is used during odd-numbered years; Year II, during even-numbered years.

Like the Order for Sundays and the Solemnities of the Lord, then, the weekday Order of Readings is governed by similar application of the principles of harmony and of semicontinuous reading, especially in the case of seasons with their own distinctive character.

d. Readings for celebrations of the Saints

70. Two groups of readings are provided for celebrations of the Saints:

1. The Proper of Saints provides the first group, for Solemnities, Feasts, or Memorials and particularly when there are proper texts for such celebrations. Sometimes in the Proper, however, there is a reference to the most appropriate among the texts in the Commons as the one to be given preference.
2. The Commons of Saints provide the second, more extensive group of readings. There are, first, appropriate texts for the different classes of Saints (Martyrs, Pastors, Virgins, etc.), then a great many texts that deal with holiness in general. These are for alternative use whenever the Commons are indicated as the source for the choice of readings.

71. As to their sequence, all the texts in this part of the Order of Readings appear in the order in which they are to be read at Mass. Thus the Old Testament texts are first, then the texts of an Apostle, followed by the Psalms and Verses between the readings, and finally the texts from the Gospels. The rationale of this arrangement is that, unless otherwise noted, the celebrant may choose at will from such texts, in view of the pastoral needs of the assembly taking part in the celebration.

e. Readings for Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead

72. For Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead, the texts for the readings are arranged as just described, that is, many texts are grouped together in the order of their use, as in the Commons of Saints.

f. **Main criteria applied in choosing and arranging the readings**

73. In addition to the guiding principles already given for the arrangement of readings in the individual parts of the Order of Readings, others of a more general nature are:

1. *Reservation of some books on the basis of the liturgical season*

74. In this Order of Readings, some biblical books are set aside for particular liturgical seasons on the basis of both the intrinsic importance of subject matter and liturgical tradition. For example, the Western (Ambrosian and Hispanic) and Eastern tradition of reading Acts during Easter Time is respected. This usage results in a clear presentation of how the Church derives the beginning of its entire life from the Paschal Mystery. Another tradition of both the West and the East that is retained is the reading of the Gospel of John in the latter weeks of Lent and in Easter Time.

Tradition assigns the reading of Isaiah, especially the first part, to Advent. Some texts of this book, however, are read during Christmas Time, to which 1 John is also assigned.

2. *Length of texts*

75. A *via media* is followed in regard to the length of texts. A distinction has been made between narratives, which require reading a fairly long passage but which usually hold the people's attention, and texts that should not be lengthy because of the profundity of their teaching.

In the case of certain rather long texts, longer and shorter versions are provided to suit different situations. The editing of the shorter version has been carried out with great caution.

3. *Difficult texts*

76. In readings for Sundays and Solemnities, texts that present real difficulties are avoided for pastoral reasons. The difficulties may be objective, in that the texts themselves raise complex literary, critical, or exegetical problems; or, at least to a certain extent, the difficulties may lie in the faithful's ability to understand the texts. But there could be no justification for depriving the faithful of the spiritual riches of certain texts on the grounds of difficulty if its source is the inadequacy either of the religious education that every Christian should have or of the biblical formation that every pastor should have. Often a difficult reading is clarified by its correlation with another in the same Mass.

4. *Omission of texts*

77. The omission of verses in readings from Scripture has at times been the practice in many liturgical traditions, including the Roman. Admittedly such omissions may not be made lightly, for fear of distorting the meaning of the text or the intent and style of Scripture. Yet on pastoral grounds it was decided to continue the tradition in the present Order of Readings, but at the same time to ensure that the essential meaning of the text remained intact. One reason for the decision is that otherwise some texts would have been unduly long. It would also have been necessary to omit completely certain readings of high spiritual value for the faithful because those readings include some verse that is unsuitable pastorally or that involves truly difficult problems.

3. Principles to be followed in the use of the Order of Readings

a. Options in the choice of some texts

78. The Order of Readings sometimes leaves it to the celebrant to choose between alternative texts or to choose one from the several listed together for the same reading. The option seldom exists on Sundays, Solemnities, or the greater Feasts in order not to obscure the proper character of the particular liturgical season or needlessly interrupt the semicontinuous reading of some biblical book. On the other hand, the option is given readily in celebrations of the Saints, in Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead.

These options, together with those indicated in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the *Ordo cantus Missae*,¹⁰³ have a pastoral aim. In planning the Liturgy of the Word, then, the Priest should consider 'the general spiritual good of the assembly rather than his personal outlook. He should be mindful that the choice of texts is to be made in consultation with the ministers and others who have a function in the celebration and should listen to the faithful in regard to the parts that more directly belong to them.'¹⁰⁴

1. *The two Readings before the Gospel*

79. In Masses to which three readings are assigned, that is, on Sundays and Solemnities, these three are to be followed strictly.¹⁰⁵

2. *Long and short forms of texts*

80. A pastoral criterion must also guide the choice between the longer and shorter forms of a text. The main consideration must be the capacity of the hearers to listen profitably either to the longer or to the shorter reading; or to listen to a more complete text that will be explained through the Homily.

3. *When two texts are provided*

81. When a choice is allowed between alternative texts, whether they are fixed or optional, the first consideration must be the best interests of those taking part. It may be a matter of using the easier texts or the one more relevant to the gathered assembly or, as pastoral advantage may suggest, of repeating or replacing a text that is assigned as proper to one celebration and optional to another.

The issue may arise when it is feared that some text will create difficulties for a particular congregation or when the same text would have to be repeated within a few days, as on a Sunday and on a following weekday.

4. *Weekday Readings*

82. The arrangement of weekday readings provides texts for every day of the week throughout the year. In most cases, therefore, these readings are to be used on their assigned days, unless a Solemnity, Feast, or Memorial with proper readings occurs.¹⁰⁶

The one using the Order of Readings for weekdays must check to see whether one reading or another from the same biblical book will have to be omitted because of some celebration

103 Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, nos. 61-64. *Missale Romanum* ex Decreto Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Vaticani II instauratum, auctoritate Pauli Pp. VI promulgatum, *Ordo cantus Missae* (Vatican Polyglot Press, 1972), *Praenotanda*, nos. 5-9.

104 General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 352.

105 Cf. *ibid.*, no. 357.

106 Cf. *ibid.*, no. 358.

occurring during the week. With the plan of readings for the entire week in mind, the Priest in that case arranges to omit the less significant selections or suitably combines them with other readings, if they contribute to an integral view of a particular theme.

5. *Celebrations of the Saints*

83. When they exist, proper readings are given for celebrations of the Saints, that is, biblical passages about the Saint or the event in the Saint's life that the Mass is celebrating. Even in the case of a Memorial these readings must take the place of the weekday readings for the same day. This Order of Readings makes explicit note of every case of proper readings on a Memorial.

In some cases there are accommodated readings, those, namely, that bring out some particular aspect of a Saint's spiritual life or apostolate. Use of such readings does not seem binding, except for compelling pastoral reasons. For the most part references are given to readings in the Commons in order to facilitate choice, but these are merely suggestions. In place of an accommodated reading or the particular reading proposed from a Common, any other reading from the Commons referred to may be selected.

The first concern of a Priest celebrating with a congregation is the spiritual benefit of the faithful and he should be careful not to impose his personal preference on them. Above all he will make sure not to omit too often or needlessly the readings assigned for each day in the weekday Lectionary: the Church's desire is to provide the faithful with a richer share at the table of God's Word.¹⁰⁷

There are also general Readings, that is, those placed in the Commons either for some determined class of Saints (Martyrs, Virgins, Pastors, etc.), or for the Saints in general. Because in these cases several texts are listed for the same reading, it will be up to the Priest to choose the one best suited to the congregation.

In all celebrations of Saints the Readings may be taken not only from the Commons to which the references are given in each case, but also from the Common of Holy Men and Women, whenever there is special reason for doing so.

84. For celebrations of the Saints:
- a. On Solemnities and Feasts the readings must be those that are given in the Proper or the Commons. For Solemnities and Feasts of the General Roman Calendar proper readings are always assigned.
 - b. On Solemnities inscribed in particular calendars, three readings are to be assigned. The First Reading is from the Old Testament (but during the Easter season, from the Acts of the Apostles or the Book of Revelation); the second, from an Apostle; the third, from the Gospels.
 - c. On Feasts and Memorials, which have only two readings, the first can be chosen from either the Old Testament or from an Apostle; the second is from the Gospels. Following the Church's traditional practice, however, the First Reading during the Easter season is to be taken from an Apostle, the second, as far as possible, from the Gospel of John.

¹⁰⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, no. 355c. Second Vatican Council, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 51.

6. *Other parts of the Order of Readings*

85. In the Order of Readings for Ritual Masses the references given are to the texts already published for the individual rites. This obviously does not include the texts belonging to celebrations that must not be integrated with Mass.¹⁰⁸
86. The Order of Readings for Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead provides many texts that can be of assistance in adapting such celebrations to the situation, circumstances, and concerns of the particular groups taking part.¹⁰⁹
87. In Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead, since many texts are given for the same reading, the choice of readings follows the criteria already indicated for the choice of readings from the Common of Saints.
88. On a day when some ritual Mass is not permitted and the norms in the individual rite allow the choice of one reading from those provided for Ritual Masses, the general spiritual welfare of the participants must be the primary consideration.¹¹⁰

b. **Responsorial Psalm and Acclamation before the Gospel**

89. Among the chants between the readings, the Psalm after the First Reading is very important. As a rule the Psalm to be used is the one assigned to the reading. But in the case of readings for the Common of Saints, Ritual Masses, Masses for Various Needs and Occasions, Votive Masses, and Masses for the Dead the choice is left up to the Priest celebrating. He will base his choice on the principle of the pastoral benefit of those participating.

But to make it easier for the people to join in the response to the Psalm, the Order of Readings lists certain other texts of Psalms and responses that have been chosen according to the various seasons or classes of Saints. Whenever the Psalm is sung, these texts may replace the text corresponding to the reading.¹¹¹

90. The chant between the Second Reading and the Gospel is either specified in each Mass and correlated with the Gospel or else it is left as a choice to be made from those in the series belonging to a liturgical season or to one of the Commons.
91. During Lent one of the Acclamations from those given in the text of the Order of Readings¹¹² may be used, depending on the occasion. This Acclamation is made before and after the Verse before the Gospel.

Chapter V

Description of the Order of Readings

92. It seems useful to provide here a brief description of the Order of Readings, at least for the principal celebrations and the different seasons of the liturgical year. With these in mind,

108 Cf. *The Roman Ritual* as revised by decree of the Second Vatican Ecumenical Council and published by authority of Pope Paul VI, *Rite of Penance* (1974; Eng. tr. 1974), Introduction, no. 13.

109 Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, no. 359.

110 Cf. *ibid.*, no. 352.

111 Cf. Volume I, nos. 173-174, Common Texts for Singing the Responsorial Psalm.

112 Cf. Volume I, Acclamations before the Gospel for Lent.

readings were selected on the basis of the rules already stated. This description is meant to assist Priests to understand the structure of the Order of Readings so that their use of it will become more perceptive and the Order of Readings a source of good for Christ's faithful.

1. Advent

a. Sundays

93. Each Gospel reading has a distinctive theme: the Lord's Coming at the end of time (First Sunday of Advent), John the Baptist (Second and Third Sunday), and the events that prepared immediately for the Lord's Nativity (Fourth Sunday).

The Old Testament readings are prophecies about the Messiah and the Messianic age, especially from Isaiah. The readings from an Apostle serve as exhortations and as proclamations, in keeping with the different themes of Advent.

b. Weekdays

94. There are two series of readings: one to be used from the beginning of Advent until 16 December; the other from 17 to 24 December.

In the first part of Advent there are readings from Isaiah, distributed in accord with the sequence of the book itself and including salient texts that are also read on the Sundays. For the choice of the weekday Gospel the First Reading has been taken into consideration.

On Thursday of the second week the readings of the Gospel about John the Baptist begin. The First Reading is either a continuation of Isaiah or a text chosen in view of the Gospel.

In the last week before Christmas the events that immediately prepared for the Lord's Nativity are presented from Matthew (Chapter 1) and Luke (Chapter 1). The texts in the First Reading, chosen in view of the Gospel reading, are from different Old Testament books and include important Messianic prophecies.

2. Christmas Season

a. Solemnities, Feasts, and Sundays

95. For the vigil and the three Masses of the Nativity of the Lord both the prophetic readings and the others have been chosen from the Roman tradition.

The Gospel on the Sunday within the Octave of Christmas, the Feast of the Holy Family, is about Jesus' childhood and the other readings are about the virtues of family life. On the Octave of Christmas, the Solemnity of Mary, Mother of God, the readings are about the Virgin Mother of God and the giving of the Holy Name of Jesus. On the second Sunday after Christmas, the readings are about the mystery of the Incarnation. On Epiphany, the Old Testament Reading and the Gospel continue the Roman tradition; the text for the reading from the apostolic letters is about the calling of all peoples to salvation. On the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, the texts chosen are about this mystery.

b. Weekdays

96. From 29 December on, there is a continuous reading of the whole of 1 John, which actually begins earlier, on 27 December, Feast of St. John the Evangelist, and on 28 December, Feast of the Holy Innocents. The Gospels relate manifestations of the Lord: events of

Jesus' childhood from Luke (29–30 December); passages from John 1 (31 December–5 January); other manifestations from the four Gospels (7–12 January).

3. Lent

a. Sundays

97. The Gospel Readings are arranged as follows:

The first and second Sundays retain the accounts of the Lord's Temptations and Transfiguration, with readings, however, from all three Synoptic Gospels.

On the next three Sundays, the Gospels about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus have been restored in Year A. Because these Gospels are of major importance in regard to Christian Initiation, they may also be read in Year B and Year C, especially in places where there are catechumens.

Other texts, however, are provided for Year B and Year C: for Year B, a text from John about Christ's coming glorification through his Cross and Resurrection and for Year C, a text from Luke about conversion.

On Palm Sunday of the Passion of the Lord the texts for the procession are selections from the Synoptic Gospels concerning the Lord's triumphal entrance into Jerusalem. For the Mass the reading is the account of the Lord's Passion.

The Old Testament readings are about the history of salvation, which is one of the themes proper to the catechesis of Lent. The series of texts for each Year presents the main elements of salvation history from its beginning until the promise of the New Covenant.

The readings from the letters of the Apostles have been selected to fit the Gospel and the Old Testament readings and, to the extent possible, to provide a connection between them.

b. Weekdays

98. The readings from the Gospels and the Old Testament were selected because they are related to each other. They treat various themes of the Lenten catechesis that are suited to the spiritual significance of this season. Beginning with Monday of the Fourth Week of Lent, there is a semicontinuous reading of the Gospel of John, made up of texts that correspond more closely to the themes proper to Lent.

Because the readings about the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus are now assigned to Sundays, but only for Year A (in Year B and Year C they are optional), provision has been made for their use on weekdays. Thus at the beginning of the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Weeks of Lent optional Masses with these texts for the Gospel have been inserted and may be used in place of the readings of the day on any weekday of the respective week.

In the first half of Holy Week the readings are about the mystery of Christ's Passion. For the Chrism Mass the readings bring out both Christ's messianic mission and its continuation in the Church by means of the Sacraments.

4. The Sacred Paschal Triduum and Easter Time

a. The Sacred Paschal Triduum

99. On Maundy Thursday at the evening Mass the remembrance of the Supper preceding Christ's departure casts its own special light because of the Lord's example in washing the feet of his disciples, and Paul's account of the institution of the Christian Passover in the Eucharist.

On Good Friday the liturgical service has as its centre John's narrative of the Passion of him who was portrayed in Isaiah as the Servant of the Lord, and who became the one High Priest by offering himself to the Father.

On the holy night of the Easter Vigil there are seven Old Testament readings, recalling the wonderful works of God in the history of salvation. There are two New Testament readings, the announcement of the Resurrection according to one of the Synoptic Gospels, and a reading from St. Paul on Christian Baptism as the sacrament of Christ's Resurrection.

The Gospel Reading for the Mass on Easter Day is from John on the finding of the empty tomb. There is also, however, the option to use the Gospel texts from the Easter Vigil or, when there is an evening Mass on Easter Sunday, to use the account in Luke of the Lord's appearance to the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The First Reading is from Acts, which throughout the Easter season replaces the Old Testament reading. The reading from St. Paul concerns the living out of the Paschal Mystery in the Church.

b. Sundays

100. The Gospel readings for the first three Sundays recount the appearances of the risen Christ. The readings about the Good Shepherd are assigned to the Fourth Sunday. On the Fifth, Sixth, and Seventh Sundays, there are excerpts from the Lord's discourse and prayer at the Last Supper.

The First Reading is from Acts, in a three-year cycle of parallel and progressive selections: material is presented on the life of the primitive Church, its witness, and its growth.

For the reading from the Apostles, 1 Peter is in Year A, 1 John in Year B, Revelation in Year C. These are the texts that seem to fit in especially well with the spirit of joyous faith and sure hope proper to this season.

c. Weekdays

101. As on the Sundays, the First Reading is a semicontinuous reading from Acts. The Gospel Readings during the Easter Octave are accounts of the Lord's appearances. After that there is a semicontinuous reading of the Gospel of John, but with texts that have a paschal character in order to complete the reading from John during Lent. This paschal reading is made up in large part of the Lord's discourse and prayer at the Last Supper.

d. Solemnities of the Ascension and Pentecost

102. For the First Reading the Solemnity of the Ascension retains the account of the Ascension according to Acts. This text is complemented by the Second Reading from the apostolic reflections on Christ in exaltation at the right hand of the Father. For the Gospel Reading, each of the three Years has its own text in accord with the differences in the Synoptic Gospels.

In the evening Mass celebrated on the vigil of Pentecost four Old Testament texts are provided; any one of them may be used, in order to bring out the many aspects of Pentecost. The reading from the Apostles shows the actual working of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Gospel Reading recalls the promise of the Spirit made by Christ before his own glorification.

For the Mass on Pentecost itself, in accord with received usage, the account in Acts of the great occurrence on Pentecost is taken as the First Reading. The texts from Paul bring out the effect of the action of the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church. The Gospel Reading is a remembrance of Jesus bestowing his Spirit on the disciples on Easter evening; other optional texts describe the action of the Spirit on the disciples and on the Church.

5. Ordinary Time

a. Arrangement and choice of texts

103. Ordinary Time begins on the Monday after the Sunday following 6 January; it lasts until the Tuesday before Lent inclusive. It begins again on the Monday after Pentecost Sunday and finishes before Evening Prayer I of the first Sunday of Advent. The Order of Readings provides readings for thirty-four Sundays and the weeks following them. In some years, however, there are only thirty-three weeks of Ordinary Time. Further, some Sundays either belong to another season (the Sunday on which the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord falls and Pentecost) or else are impeded by a Solemnity that coincides with Sunday (for example, Most Holy Trinity or Our Lord Jesus Christ, King of the Universe).
104. For the correct arrangement in the use of the readings for Ordinary Time, the following are to be respected:
 1. The Sunday on which the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord falls replaces the First Sunday in Ordinary Time. Therefore the readings of the First Week of Ordinary Time begin on the Monday after the Sunday following 6 January. When the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is celebrated on Monday because Epiphany has been celebrated on the Sunday, the readings of the First Week begin on Tuesday.
 2. The Sunday following the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time. The remaining Sundays are numbered consecutively up to the Sunday preceding the beginning of Lent. The readings for the week in which Ash Wednesday falls are suspended after the Tuesday readings.
 3. For the resumption of the readings of Ordinary Time after Pentecost Sunday:
 - when there are thirty-four Sundays in Ordinary Time, the week to be used is the one that immediately follows the last week used before Lent.¹¹³
 - when there are thirty-three Sundays in Ordinary Time, the first week that would have been used after Pentecost is omitted, in order to reserve for the end of the year the eschatological texts that are assigned to the last two weeks.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ So, for example, when there are six weeks before Lent, the seventh week begins on the Monday after Pentecost. The Solemnity of the Holy Trinity replaces the Sunday of Ordinary Time.

¹¹⁴ When there are, for example, five weeks before Lent, the Monday after Pentecost begins with the Seventh Week of Ordinary Time and the Sixth Week is dropped.

b. Sunday readings

1. Gospel readings

105. On the Second Sunday of Ordinary Time the Gospel continues to centre on the manifestation of the Lord, which Epiphany celebrates through the traditional passage about the wedding feast at Cana and two other passages from John.

Beginning with the Third Sunday, there is a semicontinuous reading of the Synoptic Gospels. This reading is arranged in such a way that, as the Lord's life and preaching unfold, the teaching proper to each of these Gospels is presented.

This distribution also provides a certain coordination between the meaning of each Gospel and the progress of the liturgical year. Thus after Epiphany the readings are on the beginning of the Lord's preaching and they fully accord with Christ's Baptism and the first events in which he manifests himself. The liturgical year leads quite naturally to a termination in the eschatological theme proper to the last Sundays, since the chapters of the Synoptics that precede the account of the Passion treat this eschatological theme rather extensively.

After the Sixteenth Sunday in Year B, five readings are incorporated from John 6 (the discourse on the bread of life). This is the proper place for these readings because the multiplication of the loaves from John takes the place of the same account in Mark. In the semicontinuous reading of Luke for Year C, the introduction of this Gospel has been prefixed to the first text (that is, on the Third Sunday). This passage expresses the author's intention very beautifully and there seemed to be no better place for it.

2. Old Testament readings

106. These readings have been chosen to correspond to the Gospel passages in order to avoid an excessive diversity between the readings of different Masses and, above all to bring out the unity between the Old and New Testaments. The relationship between the readings of the same Mass is shown by a precise choice of the headings prefixed to the individual readings.

To the degree possible, the readings were chosen in such a way that they would be short and easy to grasp. But care has been taken to ensure that many Old Testament texts of major significance would be read on Sundays. Such readings are distributed, not according to a logical order, but on the basis of what the Gospel reading requires. Still, the treasury of the Word of God will be opened up in such a way that nearly all the principal pages of the Old Testament will become familiar to those taking part in the Mass on Sundays.

3. Readings from the Apostles

107. There is a semicontinuous reading of the Letters of Paul and James. (The Letters of Peter and John are read during Easter and Christmas Time.) Because it is quite long and deals with such diverse issues, the First Letter to the Corinthians has been spread over the three years of the cycle at the beginning of Ordinary Time. It also was thought best to divide Hebrews into two parts; the first part is read in Year B and the second in Year C.

Only readings that are short and readily grasped by the people have been chosen.

Table IV at the end of this Introduction¹¹⁵ indicates the distribution of letters of the Apostles over the three-year cycle of the Sundays of Ordinary Time.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Volume I, Table IV.

c. Readings for Solemnities of the Lord during Ordinary Time

108. On the Solemnities of the Most Holy Trinity, Most Holy Body and Blood of the Lord, and the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, the texts chosen correspond to the principal themes of these celebrations.

The readings of the Thirty-Fourth and last Sunday of Ordinary Time celebrate Christ the King. He was prefigured by David and heralded as king amid the humiliations of his Passion and Cross; he reigns in the Church and will come again at the end of time.

d. Weekday readings

109. 1) The Gospels are so arranged that Mark is read first (First to Ninth Week), then Matthew (Tenth to Twenty-First Week), then Luke (Twenty-Second to Thirty-Fourth Week). Mark 1-12 are read in their entirety, with the exception only of the two passages of Mark 6 that are read on weekdays in other seasons. From Matthew and Luke the readings comprise all the matters not contained in Mark. From all three Synoptics or from two of them, as the case may be, all those passages are read that either are distinctively presented in each Gospel or are needed for a proper understanding of its progression. Jesus' eschatological discourse as contained in its entirety in Luke is read at the end of the liturgical year.
110. 2) The First Reading is taken in periods of weeks first from the Old then from the New Testament; the number of weeks depends on the length of the biblical books read.

Rather large sections are read from the New Testament books in order to give the substance, as it were, of each of the letters of the Apostles.

From the Old Testament there is room only for select passages that, as far as possible, bring out the character of the individual books. The historical texts have been chosen in such a way as to provide an overall view of the history of salvation before the Lord's Incarnation. But lengthy narratives could hardly be presented; sometimes verses have been selected that make for a reading of moderate length. In addition, the religious significance of the historical events is sometimes brought out by means of certain texts from the wisdom books that are placed as prologues or conclusions to a series of historical readings.

Nearly all the Old Testament books have found a place in the Order of Readings for weekdays in the Proper of Time. The only omissions are the shortest of the prophetic books (Obadiah and Zephaniah) and the poetic book (Song of Solomon). Of those narratives written to edify and requiring a rather long reading to be understood, Tobit and Ruth are included, but Esther and Judith are omitted. (Texts from these two books are assigned to Sundays and weekdays at other times of the year.)

Tables are given to list the way the books of the Old and the New Testament are distributed over the weekdays in Ordinary Time in the course of two years.¹¹⁶ At the end of the liturgical year the readings are from Daniel and Revelation, the books that correspond to the eschatological character of this period.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Volume II, Tables I and II.

Chapter VI

Adaptations, Translations, and Format of the Order of Readings

1. Adaptations and Translations

111. In the liturgical assembly the Word of God must always be read either from the Latin texts prepared by the Holy See or from vernacular translations approved by the Conferences of Bishops for liturgical use, according to existing norms.¹¹⁷

The version of the biblical passages should conform to the Latin text for liturgical use, taken from the Neo-Vulgate.¹¹⁸ In translating the texts of Sacred Scripture, while observing the principles of sound exegesis and of the careful consideration of linguistic experts, one must diligently attend to the liturgical use, and to the demands of oral communication, of proclamation, and of singing, especially with regard to the Psalms and the biblical Canticles.

It is thus desirable that these versions also gradually acquire a certain uniformity and stability so that, at least in the principal texts, there is a single translation, approved by several Conferences of Bishops in the nations that use the same language.¹¹⁹

112. The Lectionary for Mass must be translated integrally in all its parts, including the Introduction. If the Conference of Bishops has judged it necessary and useful to add certain adaptations, these are to be incorporated after receiving *recognitio* of the Apostolic See.¹²⁰

113. The size of the Lectionary will necessitate editions in more than one volume; no particular division of the volumes is prescribed. But each volume is to contain the explanatory texts on the structure and purpose of the section it contains.

The ancient custom is recommended of having separate books, one for the Gospels and the other for the readings for the Old and the New Testament.

It may also be useful to publish separately a Sunday Lectionary, which could also contain selected excerpts from the Sanctoral cycle, and a weekday Lectionary. A practical basis for dividing the Sunday Lectionary is the three-year cycle, so that all the readings for each year are presented in sequence.

But there is freedom to adopt other arrangements that may be devised and seem to have pastoral advantages.

114. The texts for the chants are always to be adjoined to the readings, but separate books containing the chants alone are permitted. It is recommended that the texts be printed with divisions into stanzas.
115. Whenever a text consists of different parts, the typography must make this structure of the text clear. It is likewise recommended that even non-poetic texts be printed with division into sense lines to assist the proclamation of the readings.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Code of Canon Law, *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 828 § 1.

¹¹⁸ Cf. John Paul II, Apostolic Constitution *Scripturarum thesaurus*, 25 April 1979; *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrarum*, Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis 1979.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, no. 36.

¹²⁰ Cf. Code of Canon Law, *Codex Iuris Canonici*, can. 828 § 2.

116. Where there are long and short forms of a text, they are to be printed separately so that each can be read with ease. But if such a separation does not seem feasible, a way is to be found to ensure that each text can be proclaimed without mistakes.
117. In vernacular editions the texts are not to be printed without the headings prefixed. If it seems advisable, an introductory note on the general meaning of the passage may be added to the heading. This note is to carry some distinctive symbol or is to be set in different type to show clearly that it is an optional text.¹²¹
118. It would be useful for every volume to have an index of the passages of the Bible, modelled on the biblical index of the present volume.¹²² This will provide ready access to texts of the Lectionaries for Mass that may be needed or helpful for specific occasions.

2. Format of Individual Readings

For each reading the present volume carries the textual reference, the heading, and the incipit.

a. Text references

119. The text reference (that is, chapter and verse) is always given according to the Neo-Vulgate edition, except for the Psalms.¹²³ But a second reference according to the original text (Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek) has been added wherever there is a discrepancy. Depending on the decrees of the competent authorities for the individual languages, vernacular versions may retain the enumeration corresponding to the version of the Bible approved for liturgical use by the same authorities. Exact references to chapter and verses, however, must always appear and may be given in the text or in the margin.
120. These references provide liturgical books with the source of the ‘announcement’ (*inscriptio*) of the text that must be read in the celebration, but which is not printed in this volume. This ‘announcement’ of the text will observe the following norms, but they may be altered by decree of the competent authorities on the basis of what is customary and useful for different places and languages.
121. 1) The formula to be used is always: ‘A reading from the Book of...’, ‘A reading from the Letter of...’ or ‘A reading from the Gospel of...’ and not: ‘The beginning of...’ (unless this seems advisable in particular instances) or: ‘Continuation of...’
122. 2) The traditionally accepted titles for books are to be retained, with the following exceptions:
 - a Where there are two books with the same name, the title is to be: The First Book, The Second Book (e.g., of Kings, of Maccabees) or The First Letter, The Second Letter.
 - b The title more common in current usage is to be accepted for the following books:
 I and II Samuel instead of I and II Kings;
 I and II Kings instead of III and IV Kings;
 I and II Chronicles instead of I and II Paralipomenon;
 Books of Ezra and Nehemiah instead of I and II Ezra.

¹²¹ Cf. General Instruction of the Roman Missal, nos. 31, 51, 105b, 184.

¹²² Cf. Index of Readings at the end of each volume of this edition.

¹²³ The references for the Psalms follow the order of the *Liber Psalmorum*, published by the Pontifical Commission for the Neo-Vulgate (Vatican Polyglot Press, 1969, revised 1986). The numbering of the Psalms gives the Hebrew numbering followed by that of the Septuagint text.

- c. The distinguishing titles for the wisdom books are: Book of Job, Book of Proverbs, Book of Ecclesiastes or Qoheleth, Song of Songs, Book of Wisdom, Book of Ecclesiasticus or Sirach.
- d. For all the books that are included among the prophets in the Neo-Vulgate, the formula is to be: 'A reading from the Prophet Isaiah,' or 'Jeremiah' or 'Baruch' and thus for all prophetic books, even in the case of books not universally regarded as in fact prophetic.
- e. The title is to be Book of Lamentations and Letter to the Hebrews, with no mention of Jeremiah and Paul.

b. Heading

123. There is a *heading* prefixed to each text, chosen carefully (usually from the words of the text itself) in order to point out the main theme of the reading and, when necessary, to make the connection between the readings of the same Mass clear.

c. Incipit

124. In this Order of Readings the first element of the incipit is the customary introductory phrase, 'At that time,' 'In those days,' 'Brothers and sisters,' 'Beloved,' or 'Thus says the Lord.' These words are not given when the text itself provides sufficient indication of the time or the persons involved or where such phrases would not fit in with the very nature of the text. For the individual languages, such phrases may be changed or dropped by decree of the competent authorities.

After the first words of the incipit the Order of Readings gives the proper beginning of the reading, with some words deleted or supplied for intelligibility, inasmuch as the text is separated from its context. When the text for a reading is made up of nonconsecutive verses and this has required changes in wording, these are appropriately indicated.

d. Final acclamation

125. In order to facilitate the congregation's acclamation, the words for the reader 'The word of the Lord,' or similar words suited to local custom, are to be printed at the end of the reading for use by the reader.