



My Dear Brothers and Sisters,

This week we move into examining the Liturgy of the Word. As I mentioned last week, the proclamation of the word is one of the ways that Jesus is present in the Mass. This means that in a very real way, we meet Jesus in the Word. This is important because when we miss the Liturgy of the Word, we miss an important encounter with Jesus.

A little background for how the readings are selected. There are two different cycles for the readings: The Daily Mass readings, and the Sunday Mass readings.

The Daily Mass readings are comprised of a First Reading (not from the Gospels or the Psalms), the Responsorial Psalm, and a Gospel. The Daily Mass readings are on a two-year cycle, named Year I and Year II. Year I is on odd years and Year II is on even years (heading into 2024, we're starting Year II). The cycle is only different for Ordinary Time, so the Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter readings are the same for both years. Additionally, the Gospel is the same for both years, so the Daily Mass readings that change are only the first reading and the Psalm. During Ordinary Time, the Gospels go pretty much sequentially, beginning in Mark, then moving to Matthew, and ending with Luke. John is read extensively throughout the Easter Season. The First Readings also go sequentially (though often skipping major sections) through a book of the Bible, but we don't go from beginning to end. We could be reading from a letter of St. Paul one week and be in the Old Testament Prophets the next. The Psalm is chosen from the theme of the First Reading.

Sunday Mass readings are made up of an Old Testament reading (though in Easter, it may be a reading from the Acts of the Apostles or Revelation), Responsorial Psalm, New Testament reading (not a Gospel, Acts, or Revelation), and then the Gospel. The Sunday readings are on a three-year cycle – Years A, B and C. At the beginning of Advent, we began Year B. Year A typically draws from Matthew, Year B from Mark (and supplements with some from John, since Mark is so short), and Year C from Luke. During the special seasons, the readings typically follow a theme (and John is used extensively in Easter), but in Ordinary Time, the Gospel follows through the Gospel in order. The First Reading is chosen to match a theme from the Gospel, and, as with Daily Mass, the Psalm is chosen from a theme in the First Reading. So, if you're paying attention, you should be able to find some common themes between the First Reading, the Psalm and the Gospel. The Second Reading makes its way through the New Testament letters. This means that there is no intention (at least during Ordinary Time) to have a unified theme between the second reading and the other readings.

One last piece of Scripture which is often overlooked in the Liturgy of the Word is the Gospel Acclamation. Except during Lent, the Gospel Acclamation is always an "Alleluia," and includes a verse from Scripture. This verse is meant to highlight a theme from the Gospel.

We'll look further into the Liturgy of the Word next week. Even with the two sets of cycles of readings, we do not get the whole of Scripture. We do get most of the Gospels, but there are gaps in other parts of the Bible. However, it should be noted that with the reform in Liturgy after the Second Vatican Council, much more Scripture was included. Also to be noted is that the priest does not choose the readings. This prevents the priest from preaching only on the passages he likes or with which he feels most comfortable.