

Letters are usually read over the course of a number of Sundays and do not have any direct connection with the message of the Gospel and First Reading.

Praying the Psalm

The psalm is the link between the two readings and it is meant to be prayed and not simply read. The psalms were first prayed by the people of Israel during the time of King David 3000 years ago and they are still prayed by the Jewish people today. They were the regular prayers of Jesus and he would have prayed them several times a day. He also quotes them regularly throughout the Gospels.

The psalms cover a full range of human emotions from praise and thanksgiving, to sorrow, lament and crying out to God for help. They are the kind of prayers that still speak to the human heart today.

Ideally the psalms should be sung at Mass but if spoken, then the congregation is invited to respond in the refrain. In this way, everyone, and not just the reader, participates in the prayer.

FINAL THOUGHT

“The Sacred Scriptures are the very source of evangelisation. Consequently, we need to be constantly trained in hearing the Word.”

POPE FRANCIS, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 174.



© The official logo for the Sunday of the Word of God was unveiled at the Vatican January 17 2020 by the Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization. The colourful logo depicts "The Road to Emmaus" and is based on an icon written by the late Benedictine Sister Marie-Paul Farran.

Your Word, O Lord, is a lamp for my steps and a light for my path.
Psalm 119:105



IV

Structure of the Liturgy of the Word

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STRUCTURE OF THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The selection of readings from the Bible that is proclaimed at both Sunday and weekday Mass is the revealed Word of God. Human authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write these texts. Sometimes called a 'book of books,' our Bible contains different types of writing by a variety of authors, writing at different times for different groups of people. Yet all of this writing is the revealed Word of God.

The readings proclaimed in the liturgy are contained in the Lectionary, a selection of readings chosen from the Bible. Sunday readings are proclaimed over a cycle of three years while the weekday readings follow a two year cycle.

Gospel

The high point of the Sunday liturgy of the Word is the Gospel. Each of the three years of the liturgical cycle focuses on one particular synoptic Gospel (Matthew, Mark and Luke). The Gospel of John is read during Lent and Eastertide. The beauty of this arrangement is that by focusing on a specific Gospel each year, that Gospel speaks for itself and the evangelist has an opportunity to present his picture of Jesus as seen through his eyes.

We are very familiar with the Gospels and often focus on them to the detriment of the other readings. However, it is important to remember that the other readings are also the revealed Word of God and the ministry of the Minister of the Word is to proclaim God's message through those readings.

First Reading

For most of the year, the first Reading is taken from the Old Testament. During Eastertide, it comes from the Acts of the Apostles. The Old Testament is the journey to faith of a people and readings can range from history to prayers, poetry, prophetic oracles, wisdom literature etc. While it may seem as if there is no

logical order to the way the Old Testament readings are chosen, their purpose is to highlight some aspect of the message of the Gospel passage. An example of this is the 26th Sunday in Year C when the first reading is taken from the prophet Amos where he lambasts the rich "who lie on their ivory beds and . . . drink wine by the bowlful." The Gospel reading from Luke follows this by telling the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus where Lazarus is raised up while the rich man ends up in eternal punishment.

The majority of Old Testament readings are taken from the prophets who spoke God's message to the people. This involved calling the people back to God when they strayed, denouncing all forms of injustice and but also looking forward to a relationship of love with God as they respond to God's covenant with them.

Second Reading

The Second Reading is usually taken from the letters written to the early church by some of the apostles and in particular by St. Paul. Since they are letters, they are written by a specific person, to a specific community at a specific time and usually focus on a particular topic. As the early Christian communities try to work out how they should live as followers of Jesus, the letters support them, offer advice and at times admonish them if they stray from the message they have been given. As well as containing this formal teaching, they also make references to Paul's friends in the various communities and give us an insight into Paul's own life and difficulties.

Some of the topics covered in the letters are very much of their time (e.g. an acceptance of slavery and of the position of women in a patriarchal society) and must be read in that context. It does not mean that we have to take those messages literally or that Christianity condones these practices today. However, most of the advice given by Paul and the other letter writers is as relevant now as it was 2000 years ago.