

The Revised Lectionary

The revised Sunday lectionary, long awaited and much publicized because of the controversies that caused its delay, was first heard in most Roman Catholic parishes in the United States on the First Sunday of Advent, November 29, 1998. By now, most who are aware of the lectionary at all will have realized that the changes are minor. The strengths of the 1970 lectionary certainly remain and in some small ways have been increased. The weaknesses? They remain, too.

But this year in which we begin to use the revised lectionary may well be a year for some catechesis. The best help there is a new book from Liturgy Training Publications: *Guide to the Revised Lectionary*, by Martin Connell (available in English or in Spanish; 1-800-933-1800). It offers a brief history of the lectionary and an understanding of the structure and use of the present lectionary.



Many Other Things

The following notes, which in a slightly different version went to everyone who purchased the Sunday lectionary from LTP, are intended to supplement the *Guide*. They are a kind of “user’s introduction” to the lectionary volume itself. Even those who have purchased a lectionary from another publisher may find these notes helpful.

What’s New in the Revised Lectionary?

There are four areas where this lectionary differs from the one in use until now.

This is a revised lectionary.

The lectionary prepared after Vatican II introduced three (rather than two) readings on Sundays and great feasts, and it provided for a three-year (rather than a one-year) cycle of Sunday readings. And, of course, the reform of Vatican II introduced readings in the languages of the people. When this lectionary appeared in English in 1970, it was the first time in centuries that the book of readings (lectionary) had been separated from the book of prayers (sacramentary); both were until then included in the *Missale Romanum*.

In the early 1980s, the Roman congregation responsible for liturgy made minor changes to that first edition of the lectionary. Only now are these changes being incorporated into the English-language lectionary. Mostly, these changes consist of additional readings for some feasts (giving them a full three-year cycle of readings). So, for example, in the English lectionary of 1970, there was only one set of readings for the feast of the Holy Family. The 1980 revision provided three sets — one for each year, A, B, C. Only now does the English-language lectionary make the additional two sets of readings available.

This is a lectionary in several volumes.

The English lectionary was originally published in 1970. From then until now, the lectionary has usually been published in a single volume. With the 1998 revision, the readings for Sundays and major feasts have been separated from the readings for weekdays. The readings for weekdays, saints’ days and various ritual Masses have been approved by the United States bishops and have been sent to Rome for confirmation. When this confirmation is received, a date will be set to begin using the revised lectionary at every Mass. This may come as soon as Advent 1999.

Gabe Huck

LTP is publishing the Sundays and major feasts in three volumes: Year A, Year B and Year C. There is some repetition within the volumes (e.g., the readings for Christmas Masses and for the Triduum do not differ from year to year but are provided in each of these volumes). Year A began last Advent: November 29, 1998. The two other volumes will be published in 1999.

A revised translation has been approved for use in the revised lectionary.

From 1970 until now, three translations have been approved for use in the United States: The New American Bible (NAB), the Jerusalem Bible (JB) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV). Many other English-speaking countries have used only the Jerusalem Bible translation until recently. In the early 1990s, the Canadian bishops approved the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) for the lectionary in Canada.

When the process of publishing the lectionary is completed in the United States (that is, when the lectionary volume for weekdays comes into use), only the revised New American Bible translation will have the approval of the American bishops. But note that the Contemporary English Version (CEV) continues to have the bishops' approval for use at Masses with Children.

Much of the attention during the past years of debate among the U.S. bishops and between the bishops and the Roman congregations has not been about the revision in the lectionary as such (as noted, that was set by Rome more than 15 years ago and the bishops are just now implementing it). The debate has been about how the scriptures should be translated into English in the lectionary. Revising the lectionary and approving a new or revised translation for use in the lectionary are separate questions. The bishops have said, in fact, that in five years they will review this translation and may make changes.

The manner of presenting the readings has changed.

In the lectionary that has been in use until now, most readings were printed in a "paragraph," or prose, style. Only the psalms and some readings from the prophets were printed in a poetic style. The Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy decided that all lectionaries published in the United States should use a style that looks like the poetic style. This is an attempt to help the reader by dividing every text into "sense lines." This format obviously takes more space and is a principal reason that the lectionary now is divided into several volumes.

What's New in the LTP Lectionary?

The notes that follow concern what is unique to the lectionary published by LTP. These notes also, as well as the bulletin insert we include here (which may be reproduced without further permission from LTP), may be helpful in a broader parish catechesis. There is a need for the whole assembly to grow in understanding the structure of the lectionary and the place of the Sunday readings in parish life. In addition, the very presence of this striking new book in the midst of the assembly could occasion some serious

reflection on the liturgy of the word, on the scriptures in our homes and lives, and in the homilies of Sunday Masses.

LTP set out to produce a lectionary that would fulfill what is called for in the introduction to the revised lectionary:

Since, in liturgical celebrations the books too serve as signs and symbols of the sacred, care must be taken to ensure that they truly are worthy and beautiful.

All choices made in the preparation of this volume — page dimensions, typeface and size, color, place of the reading itself on the page, location of art, creation of the letter forms used for the initial letter of each first reading — were directed toward a book worthy of use in the liturgy. We have tried to create a book that will contribute to the beauty of the liturgy by its presence and draw forth the very best proclamation possible from all who read the scriptures to the assembly. (For more on how it was made, read the very last page of this lectionary, the colophon that explains the making of the book and acknowledges those responsible.)

When the assembly sees this book at Sunday liturgy, there may be some reaction to the cover. Seize the moment to discuss the lectionary and its "garment" (its cover). Like the fine liturgical books of earlier times with precious stones worked into their covers, the cover of this book (through careful foil stamping in many colors) is made glorious in light. These foils present images: The wood of the cross, the tree of life, is seen here, but so also might be seen as moving water. Thus these grand images of creation and of redemption — light, wood and cross, water — here enfold the church's treasure, God's word as it lives in the midst of the gathered church.

The lectionary should be handled with reverence, of course, but the book itself should inspire that reverence. Also, the book might well have a place where it can be seen before the liturgy and during the week. Closed or open to the readings of the Sunday, the lectionary — like the font and the altar — marks this place as the house of the church.

A final, practical note that may be helpful in some parishes concerns the book of gospels, which many parishes have become accustomed to using. At least at present, there is no book of gospels that contains the revised lectionary readings. Is there then no book carried in the gospel procession? I would suggest that the lectionary itself be carried. After the second reading, the lector remains in place during the silence. Then the lector closes the lectionary and takes it from the ambo, carrying it at chest height to the presider. The presider and assembly then rise, and the alleluia begins as the presider takes the lectionary/book of gospels from the lector, holds it high, and processes with the acolytes to the ambo — but not necessarily by the most direct route (this is a procession!). Thus, in the very midst of its readings of scripture, the church celebrates its book by holding that book high, acclaiming God in the alleluia, carrying light and incense, announcing, signing with the cross and kissing the words of scripture on the page of this book. ●