



LECTIONARY VS. BIBLE

LITURGY BYTES *by Michele Hall*



I am fairly certain that only our Lectors know that the Scriptures we hear at Mass come from a special book known as the Lectionary. The Church rotates the readings each year. The Sunday readings follow a three-year cycle: Year A, Year B and Year C. The weekday readings follow a two-year cycle: Year 1 (the odd years) and Year II (the even years). The Gospels are assigned as follows: Year A we hear Matthew, Year B we hear Mark, and Year C we hear Luke. The Gospel of John is always read during the Easter season and partly in Year B since Mark's Gospel is shorter than the others. On solemnities, feasts, and memorials of saints, they each have their own special readings. The book that contains all these readings, arranged according to the liturgy, is called the Lectionary. Keep in mind the Lectionary does not contain all of the Old and New Testament readings.

The very early Church did not have the Bible as we know it. During the time of the Apostles, the Christians gathered for the Eucharist would read from the Jewish Scriptures (the Old Testament) and listen to the testimonies of eyewitnesses to the life and preaching of Jesus. The testimonies were either given in person or read from the letters of Paul or another Apostle which were circulated among the Christian communities. After the Gospels were written, they were read aloud. The various New Testament writings were collected, though it took time for everyone to agree on what was considered inspired Scripture. A general agreement arose by the middle of the 2nd century AD, and by the 5th century the list of accepted books of the Bible was universally accepted. Each week at the Eucharistic celebration, the Scriptures were read in order, picking up each time where the reading left off. Gradually, certain parts of the Bible were designated for certain times of the year. These passages would be marked in the margins of the Bible, or a list would be inserted in the front. Sections were indicated by first and last word since there were no chapter or verse designations yet--those came during the 13th– 16th centuries. Eventually, these special books called Lectionaries were prepared with the readings listed in the order they were read during the year. Lectionaries were in use by the 7th century. Naturally, adaptations have been made over the centuries.

Have a blessed, peaceful, and joy-filled week ahead!