

April 8, 2018

In these articles during the Year of Prayer here at St. Mark, we have been examining the Mass in order to develop a more full, active, and conscious participation. We have reflected on the Liturgy of the Word noting that three readings are proclaimed from the Bible each Sunday. The first reading is taken from the Old Testament except during the Easter season which we are now celebrating. The second reading comes from one of the letters of the New Testament. The third reading is taken from one of the four Gospels.

These readings are found in a book called the Lectionary. This contains all the readings taken from the Bible which we proclaim in the Liturgy of the Word. This comes from the Latin word *lectio* which means to read. It is worthwhile to take some time to understand how the lectionary was put together. How were the readings from the Bible selected?

It is interesting to note that the Catholic lectionary is also used by many Protestant churches such as the Episcopalians, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Methodists. There are some differences in the readings but for the most part the same readings are proclaimed each Sunday in all of these churches.

The Sunday readings are arranged in three cycles so we hear the same readings every three years. The new year begins on the first Sunday of Advent which is the beginning of each liturgical year. We refer to these as Year A, Year B, and Year C. Each year highlights one of the three synoptic Gospels – Matthew in Year A, Mark in Year B, and Luke in Year C. The Gospel according to John is used for some of the Gospel readings during the Lent and Easter seasons as well as for five weeks during Year B (around the end of July and early August). There are a few variations in this.

In choosing the actual readings, two principles are used: the principle of harmony and the principle of semi-continuous reading.

The principle of harmony means two things. The first is that the readings are chosen to be harmony with the season of the year. This happens during Advent, Christmas, Lent, and Easter. The second is that two readings are chosen to be in harmony with one another. We see this in the choice of the Old Testament reading during the season of Ordinary Time when it is chosen to be in harmony with the Gospel reading.

The principle of semi-continuous reading is when a particular book from the Bible is chosen and parts of it are read over a period of several weeks. We see this in Ordinary Time and also in the season of Easter.

Next week we will see how these principles are applied to the season of Easter we are now celebrating and the season of Ordinary Time which will resume in June.