

Understanding the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL)

The Three-Year Cycle. The RCL operates on a three-year cycle, with Year A always beginning on the First Sunday of Advent in a year evenly divisible by three.

Readings for Sundays and Festivals. The RCL provides three readings for each Sunday and festival. The first reading is ordinarily from the Old Testament, except in Easter when it comes from Acts; the psalm (or other biblical song), ideally sung, is a prayerful response to the first reading. The second comes from a New Testament epistle or the book of Revelation. The third reading is from one of the Gospels.

Two Tracks after Pentecost. For the Sundays after Pentecost (sometimes called Ordinary Time) the RCL offers two tracks of readings from the Hebrew Scriptures. The semicontinuous readings cover major narratives and themes from the Old Testament, and are unrelated to the New Testament readings; this track is provided to encourage familiarity with and proclamation of the Hebrew Scriptures on their own terms. The complementary readings are chosen for their relationship to the Gospel reading for the day; this track reflects the Christian conviction that all of Scripture is to be understood in light of the revelation of Jesus Christ. The second reading and Gospel reading are consistent between both tracks.

Sequences of Readings. The RCL highlights different parts of the biblical story each year:

- Year A focuses on the Gospel of Matthew, and on the Sundays after Pentecost features sequences of first readings from Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua (in the semicontinuous track) and second readings from Romans, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians.
- Year B focuses on the Gospel of Mark, and on the Sundays after Pentecost features sequences of first readings from 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, Proverbs, Job, and Ruth (in the semicontinuous track) and second readings from 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, James, and Hebrews.
- Year C focuses on the Gospel of Luke, and on the Sundays after Pentecost features sequences of first readings from 1 and 2 Kings, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Jeremiah (in the semicontinuous track) and second readings from Galatians, Colossians, Hebrews, 1 and 2 Timothy, and 2 Thessalonians.
- The Gospel of John is featured on most of the festival days, during Lent, Holy Week, and Easter, and for a series of weeks after Pentecost during Year B.

Other Notable Patterns. Readings from the prophet Isaiah are prominently featured in Advent and Holy Week. For the Sundays after Epiphany, the second reading comes from Paul's letters to the church in Corinth. In the season of Easter, the first reading shifts from Hebrew Scripture to stories from Acts, relating the experiences of the first Christians following Jesus' resurrection; the second reading comes from 1 Peter (Year A), 1 John (Year B), or Revelation (Year C).