On the night before he died, Christ gathered with his disciples to celebrate the Last Supper. There, he took bread and wine and gave it to them as the everlasting sign of the new covenant in his blood (Lk 22:20). From that night onward, "the Church has never ceased to celebrate his paschal mystery by coming together to read what referred to him in all the Scriptures (Lk 24:27), and to carry out the work of salvation through the celebration of the memorial of the Lord and through the sacraments," (Lectionary for Mass [LFM], 10).

In the earliest days of the Church, the apostles gathered weekly for "the breaking of the bread and to the prayers" (Acts 2:42). St. Luke reminds us that the first of Jesus' followers still observed the cycle of Scripture readings in synagogues as a regular part of their worship (Acts 13:14ff). As well, when Christians gathered within the homes of the apostles, the Scriptures were read and preached about at length (Acts 20:9). Whether Greek or Jew, Christians read widely from the Pentateuch, the Law and the Prophets and paired these with the Gospels and the letters of the apostles as a regular preparation for the celebration of the Eucharist (Justin Martyr, 1 Apol.67).

Second Vatican Council
In line with this same ancient tradition, The Second Vatican Council recognized that "Sacred Scripture is of the greatest importance in the celebration of the liturgy. For it is from it that lessons are read and explained in the homily, and psalms are sung. It is from the Scriptures that the prayers, collects and hymns draw their inspiration and their force, and that actions and signs derive their meaning" (Constitution on the Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium [SC] 24). Further, the Council declared that the reform of the liturgy should promote an appreciation for the Scriptures by providing the faithful with "more ample, more varied and more
suitable" readings at every Mass (SC 35). This was to be done by opening up treasures of the bible "more lavishly so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's Word. In this way, a more representative part of the Sacred Scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years" (SC 51).

In response to the Council's directives, a revised *Lectionary* was prepared and approved by Pope Paul VI in the Apostolic Constitution *Missale Romanum* (April 3, 1969) and then published on Pentecost Sunday (May 25, 1969). Episcopal conferences were directed to prepare vernacular editions of the *Order of Readings for Mass* in accordance with the rules for vernacular translations then in place.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops published such an edition and decreed its mandatory use in the dioceses of the United States of America beginning with the first Sunday of Advent, November 29, 1971. The biblical text used for this edition was that of the *New American Bible*, a translation first commissioned by the Bishops' Committee for the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine in 1944. For the next two decades, some fifty scholars of the Catholic Biblical Association labored to produce a translation of the Bible from its original languages and the oldest extant texts. Over the first two decades of its use in the liturgy and in private devotion the 1970 edition of the *New American Bible* has provided immeasurable spiritual benefit.

**Second Edition of the Order of Readings for Mass**

In 1981, the Holy See issued a second Latin edition of the *Order of Readings for Mass*. This edition was approved by Pope John Paul II and published on January 21, 1981.

**Second Edition of the Lectionary for Mass for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America**

The second edition of the *Lectionary for Mass for use in the Dioceses of the United States of America* based on the second Latin edition was approved by the NCCB on June 20, 1992 and confirmed by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments on October 6, 1997.

As with its first edition, the revised *Lectionary for Mass* was based on the 1970 *New American*

Certain changes to the base text were made both for increased precision and in the interest of accurately conveying a horizontally inclusive scriptural term as well as for greater ease in proclamation.

Also of concern to the editors of the revised Lectionary for Mass was the development of a common scriptural vocabulary. By the preferential use of NAB vocabulary and phrases in the translation of titles found above readings and in the first lines of all readings, the editors attempted to develop consistent biblical-liturgical terms.

**Reflection Questions:**

1. Do I have a reverent regard for the printed word of God in the Lectionary and the Bible?

2. If I am a reader at Mass, in what ways can I become more familiar with the Lectionary—its contents and arrangement? If I am a reader at Mass, have I taken the time to read the introduction to the Lectionary?

3. Why does the Church give us the charge not to change or alter the proclaimed Word of God as given in the Lectionary?

**Prayer:**

Almighty God,  
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,  
faith in your word is the way to wisdom,  
and to ponder your divine plan is to grow in the truth.

Open our eyes to your deeds,  
our ears to the sound of your call,  
so that our every act may increase our sharing  
in the life you have offered us.

Grant this through Christ our Lord. Amen.