

CATECHESIS #13

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Why do we listen to Old Testament readings, isn't the New Testament more important?

Before the Second Vatican Council, very little of the Old Testament was ever read in Mass. To change the perception that the Old Testament had in some way become void, this council mandated an increase in Old Testament readings.

Far from discounting the Old Testament, Jesus Himself tells us: "I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Mt 5:17) Except during the Easter season, the first reading of Sunday Mass is usually taken from the Old Testament. If we are paying attention each Sunday, we will notice that the First Reading from the Old Testament parallels the Gospel reading. Saint Augustine once observed that the "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is fully revealed in the New."

After His resurrection, "Jesus explained to [the disciples] what was said about himself in all the Scriptures, beginning with the books of Moses and the writing of all the prophets." (Luke 24:27)

Taking Jesus' lead, scholars throughout history have discovered how God prepared the Israelites for His Son. For the chosen people to accept the idea of God becoming man required years of development. To do this, over the centuries, God sent men who increasingly resembled Jesus. Researching these parallels between people of the Old Testament and Christ is a study called typology.

For example, in Moses we find the foreshadowing or a "type" of Jesus – as babies, both had to be rescued from political leaders who wanted to kill them, both were saved in Egypt, both went into a desert and fasted for 40 days before beginning their ministry, Moses selected 12 princes to help him, Jesus had 12 apostles, most dramatically, Moses gave the Jewish people the Passover meal which included spreading the blood of the sacrificial lamb on the cross pieces of the door, Jesus is the sacrificial lamb who spread His blood on the cross.

Listen carefully to the Old Testament readings and be amazed at the preparation God put into His plans for our salvation from the dawn of time. The Old Testament is not dead history. It is the living Word of God. It is our story; we are a part of it. We should recognize it as a prefigurement of our own personal journey of salvation. God wants us to see our story written in the Old Testament, our struggles, failures and our ultimate triumph in Christ.