

**REV. ADRIAN FORTESCUE: *The Mass: A Study of the Roman Liturgy* (1912)**

(Page 220) We must leave the question of who chose our old propers as one of the many unknown details of the origin of our rite. The new ones are arranged by someone appointed by the Congregation of Rites and approved by it. As for why certain verses were chosen for certain days, that question too is full of difficulty. On many days the reason is obvious. When a feast has a marked character and a verse can be found that suits it, it is chosen, often with great skill. A glance through the old propria will be a new revelation of how well our fathers knew their Bibles. The finding of texts, often in remote places, that fit the occasion so perfectly argues that they must almost have known the Bible by heart.

(Page 221) The propers of Christmas, Easter, Pentecost, Commons of Saints, the Requiem and so on are quite obvious. But the ordinary Sunday Masses? Why, for instance, is the Introit for the first Sunday after Pentecost Ps. xii, 6? The question will occur again even more insistently when we come to the lessons (pp. 257-261). In no case does there seem to be any particular reason. One cannot really see any special connection between a Sunday that has no marked character and texts of the psalter that express sentiments equally suitable for any day. Sometimes there seems to be an effort to maintain a sequence of idea throughout the Proper. The Introit, Gradual, Tract, Offertory and Communion of the first Sunday in Lent, for instance, all express trust in God's protection, suiting the Gospel, in which our Lord, having rejected the devil, is served by angels. But in most cases not even a sequence of definite idea is apparent. Mystic interpreters who find a logical idea running through every office do so only by emphasizing the harmony that must exist in any series of Christian prayers. You may say that a Sunday office breathes love of God, sorrow for sin, faith and hope—any collection of prayers does so, of course. So in many cases all one can say candidly is that the unknown early compiler of the proper had to choose some texts; as a matter of fact he chose these. Each of them is certainly an excellent prayer, its idea is most appropriate for any day, therefore also for this. And the Catholic who reverences our past, who values the corporate life of the Church, cannot do better on any given day than join in the sentiments expressed by the Church for so many centuries on this day and join the vast number of his fellow Latins who are singing these venerable texts all over the world.

(Page 262) It is better perhaps to realize that attempts to explain why certain lessons are read on certain Sundays by reasons of inner appropriateness, such as the mediæval liturgiologists loved, though often ingenious, are really vain. As in the case of all the Proper, we cannot as a rule find even a definite special idea running through the whole Mass. There does not generally seem a connection between the Epistle and Gospel, except always on the feasts. It remains, of course, true that any part of Scripture may be read with profit on any day. The preacher must be content with that.

(Page 260) The most difficult Sundays to explain are those after Pentecost. The Masses for these are late; they are not provided even in the Gregorian Sacramentary. Their Gospels seem to be meant to fill up what has not yet been told of our Lord's life. But even so their arrangement is hard to understand ... It has been thought that they are suggested by the lessons of Matins. In some cases such a comparison is certainly tempting ...

(Page 261) Our conclusion as to the Roman Pericopes then must be that whatever old system there may have been is now so overlain as to be really unrecognizable. Only here and there we seem to see traces of a definite idea in their order; but the choice of those for feasts is generally obvious enough. Perhaps our present arrangement represents the fusion of various systems. It is certainly very old.

(Page 258) Originally it seems clear that the books were read in continuous order, as they still are (with considerable abbreviations) at Matins.

(Page 259) We can find in our Missal hardly a trace of any system at all. The idea of continuous readings has become so overlain that there is nothing left of it.

(Page 257) The chief question about the lessons, and the most impossible to answer satisfactorily, is on what system, if any, the Pericopes for each Mass have been chosen.