BIBLE READINGS for ADVENT and CHRISTMAS

The Sunday Mass scripture readings for December 2019 taken from the REVISED NEW JERUSALEM BIBLE
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INTRODUCTION

DOM HENRY WANSBROUGH OSB
translator and editor of the Revised New Jerusalem Bible

This small publication has been made available to show that the Revised New Jerusalem Bible is eminently suitable for public reading, and – granted the requisite ecclesiastical permissions – for reading in the Liturgy. Many of the salient points of the translation will be evident from these readings for Advent and for the Solemnity of Christmas itself.

AVOIDANCE OF ARCHAISMS

Every effort has been made to ensure that the translation, while retaining the dignity necessary for a public reading of the Word of God, should avoid archaisms, many of which stem from the great tradition of the King James Version of 1611, but today seem quaint, and would both trip a reader and distract a listener. For example:

**Isaiah 2**

It shall come to pass in the latter days (ESV)

It will happen in the last day

For out of Zion shall go forth the law (KJV)

For the Law will come from Zion

The use of ‘shall’ for an emphatic or prophetic future is now rare and awkward. Inversions can make difficulties for a reader.

**Isaiah 11**

There shall come forth a rod (KJV)

A branch will spring

and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit (ESV)

a shoot will grow from his roots

He shall not judge by what his eyes see (NRSV, ESV)

His judgement will not be by appearances

or decide disputes by what his ears hear (NRV, ESV)

his verdict not given on hearsay

He shall … decide with equity (NRSV, ESV)

He will … give fair sentence

**Romans 13**

you know the time, that the hour has come (ESV)

you know the time has come; now is the moment

Let us walk properly/honestly (KJV) as in the day

Let us live decently, as in the light of day
John 1

without him was not any thing made
that was made (ESV)
his own received him not (KJV)

not one thing came into being
except through him
his own people did not accept
him

INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The gendered form of the English language is a perpetual challenge to translators, but never more so than in the present age, when a masculine form is often taken positively to exclude the feminine. Every effort has been made to avoid this, except in the most extreme and rare cases which would result in such absurdity as: ‘If your brother or sister does something wrong, go and point it out between you and him or her alone. If he or she listens to you, you have won back your brother or sister. If he or she does not listen …’ (Matthew 18:15-16). So in the Prologue to John on Christmas Day: ‘in him was life, life that was the light of all people’, ‘all men’ becomes ‘all people’, and ‘the will of man’ (KJV, NRSV) is translated ‘human will’.

ENHANCED ACCURACY

In a number of cases accuracy has been improved. So, in John 1:14 and 1:18 (and later in Jn 3:16, 18) the special word for the ‘only-begotten’ (monogenes) Son is retained instead of the mere ‘only’ son (NRSV, ESV, not KJV). It is an adjective carefully treasured by Church Fathers as early as the second century. Similarly, the fevered mother-in-law of Peter may well not have had a bed in which to be comfortably tucked up; she is simply ‘lying there feverish’. Herod is decried not as a ‘fox’ (foxes do not occur in Palestine) but a scavenging ‘jackal’. In the parable of the Ten Wise and Foolish the young women are not ‘virgins’ (the accent is not on their sexual condition) nor ‘bridesmaids’ (they attend not on the bride but on the groom) but simply ‘girls’.

COMMON-SENSE MEASUREMENTS

Accessibility to the true nature of monuments and events is improved by use of the metric system and of real time. Without cubits, stades and watches of the night the ground-plan of Solomon’s Temple is 30 metres by 9 metres, Emmaus is 12 km from Jerusalem, and the disciples of Jesus (having no mobile phones to tell the time) are hard pressed by rowing across the Lake of Galilee till ‘not long before dawn’.

FIRST SUNDAY
OF ADVENT

FIRST READING

Isaiah 2:1–5

The vision of Isaiah son of Amoz, concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It will happen in the last days
that the mountain of the house of the LORD
will be established as the head of the mountains
and will be lifted above the heights.
Then all the nations will stream to it,
many peoples will come to it and say,
‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,
to the house of the God of Jacob,
that he may teach us his ways and we may walk in his paths.’
For the Law will come from Zion
and the Word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

Then he will judge between the nations
and arbitrate between many peoples.
They will hammer their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into sickles.
Nation will not lift sword against nation;
no longer will they learn to make war.

House of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

Psalm 121:1–2, 4b–5, 6–7, 8–9 r. 1

R: I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’

I rejoiced when they said to me,
‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’
And now our feet are standing
within your gates, O Jerusalem.
R: I rejoiced when they said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD.’
GOSPEL

Matthew 24:37-44

As it was in Noah’s day, so will be the coming of the Son of man. For in those days before the Flood people were eating, drinking, taking wives, taking husbands, until the day Noah went into the ark, and they suspected nothing till the Flood came and swept them all away. So will be the coming of the Son of man. Then of two men in the fields, one is taken, one left; of two women grinding at the mill, one is taken, one left. So stay awake, because you do not know the day when your master is coming.

You may be sure of this, that if the householder had known at what time of the night the burglar would come, he would have stayed awake and would not have allowed anyone to break through the wall of his house. Therefore, you too must stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

SECOND READING

Romans 13:11-14

Besides, you know the time has come; now is the moment for you to stop sleeping and wake up, for now our salvation is nearer than when we first began to believe. The night is far gone, day is near; so let us throw off the works of darkness and put on the armour of light. Let us live decently, as in the light of day, not with orgies or drunkenness, promiscuity or licentiousness, not with quarrelling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh to fulfil its desires.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Psalm 84:8

Let us see, O Lord, your mercy, and grant us your salvation.

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING

Isaiah 11:1-10

A branch will spring from the stock of Jesse, a shoot will grow from his roots. On him will rest the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power, the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord: his delight will be in fear of the Lord. His judgement will not be by appearances, his verdict not given on hearsay. He will judge the weak with righteousness and give fair sentence for the poor of the land. He will strike the violent with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked. Righteousness will be the belt around his waist and truth the belt about his hips.
The wolf will live with the lamb, 
the leopard lie down with the kid, 
calf, lion and fat-stock beast together, 
with a little boy to lead them. 
The cow and the bear will graze, 
their young will lie down together. 
The lion will eat hay like the ox. 
The infant will play over the hole of the adder, 
the baby will put its hand into the viper’s lair. 
No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, 
for the land will be full of knowledge of the LORD, 
as the waters cover the sea.

That day, the root of Jesse, 
standing as a signal for the peoples, 
will be sought out by the nations 
and its dwelling will be glorious.

**SECOND READING**

**Romans 15:4–9**

Everything that was written earlier was written for our instruction so that we should have hope through perseverance and through the encouragement of the scriptures. May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you all the same purpose, following the example of Christ Jesus, so that, united in heart and mind, you may together give glory to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ with one voice.

Accept one another, then, as Christ accepted you, for the glory of God. I tell you that Christ became a servant of the circumcised for the sake of God’s truth, to confirm the promises made to our fathers, and so that the gentiles should give glory to God for his mercy, as it is written: Therefore I shall praise you among the nations and sing praise to your name.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**Luke 3:4, 6**

Prepare a way for the LORD, make his paths straight, 
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.

**GOSPEL**

**Matthew 3:1–12**

In those days, John the Baptist came, proclaiming in the desert of Judaea, saying, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven has drawn near.’ This was the man spoken of by the prophet Isaiah when he said:

*A voice of one crying in the desert,  
‘Prepare a way for the Lord,  
make his paths straight.’*

John himself wore a garment of camel-hair with a leather belt round his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. Then Jerusalem and all Judaea and the whole region around the Jordan district kept going out to him, and they were baptised by him in the River Jordan as they confessed their sins. But seeing many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism he said to them, ‘Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Produce fruit worthy of repentance, and do not be
satisfied with saying to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father,” for I tell you, God can raise children for Abraham from these stones. Even now the axe is being laid to the root of the trees, so any tree failing to produce good fruit is cut down and thrown on the fire. I baptise you with water for repentance, but the one who comes after me is more powerful than I, and I am not fit to carry his sandals; he will baptise you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing-fan is in his hand; he will clear his threshing-floor and gather his wheat into his barn; but the chaff he will burn in a fire that never goes out.’

THIRD SUNDAY
OF ADVENT

FIRST READING

Isaiah 35:1–6a, 10

Let the desert and the arid lands be glad, let the wasteland rejoice and bloom; let it burst into flower like the crocus, let it rejoice and sing for joy. The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it, the splendour of Carmel and Sharon; they shall see the glory of the Lord, the splendour of our God. Strengthen all weary hands, steady all trembling knees and say to the faint-hearted, ‘Be strong! Do not be afraid. Here is your God, vengeance is coming, divine retribution; he is coming to save you.’

Then the eyes of the blind will be opened, the ears of the deaf unsealed, then the lame will leap like a deer and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy;

Those ransomed by the Lord shall return and come to Zion shouting for joy, crowned with joy unending; rejoicing and gladness will escort them and sorrow and sighing will take flight.

PSALM

Psalm 145:6–7, 8–9a, 9b–10

[It is the Lord] who preserves fidelity for ever, who does justice to those who are oppressed. It is he who gives bread to the hungry; the Lord who sets prisoners free, the Lord who opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord who raises up those who are bowed down. It is the Lord who loves the righteous, the Lord who protects the stranger and upholds the orphan and the widow. The Lord will reign for ever, Zion’s God from age to age.

SECOND READING

James 5:7–10

Now be patient, brothers and sisters, until the Lord’s coming. See how a farmer waits patiently for the precious fruit of the earth until it receives the autumn rain and the spring rain. You too must be patient; do not lose heart, because the Lord’s coming is near. Do not make complaints against one another, brothers and sisters, so as not to be brought to judgement yourselves; see, the judge is standing at the gates. For your example of patience in persecution take the prophets who spoke in the Lord’s name.
FOURTH SUNDAY OF ADVENT

FIRST READING

Isaiah 7:10–14

The LORD spoke to Ahaz again and said:

'Ask the LORD your God for a sign, either in the depths of Sheol or in the heights above.'

But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask. I will not put the LORD to the test.' He then said:

'Listen now, House of David! Not satisfied with trying human patience, will you try my God’s patience too? The Lord will give you a sign in any case. Look, the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son whom she will call Immanuel.'

PSALM

Psalm 23:1–2, 3–4, 5–6

The LORD’s is the earth and its fullness, the world, and those who dwell in it. It is he who set it on the seas; on streams of water he made it firm.

Who shall climb the mountain of the LORD? Who shall stand in his holy place? The clean of hands and pure of heart, whose soul is not set on vain things.

Blessings from the LORD shall they receive, and righteousness from God their saviour. Such are the people who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob.
SECOND READING

Romans 1:1-7

From Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel that God had promised through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son who, according to the flesh, was a descendant of David and who, in terms of the Spirit and of holiness, was designated Son of God in power by resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ, our Lord, through whom we have received grace and our apostolic mission of winning the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of his name, including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ. To you all, God’s beloved in Rome, called to be saints: grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Matthew 1:23

Look, the virgin is with child and they shall call his name Emmanuel which means ‘God-is-with-us’.

GOSPEL

Matthew 1:18-24

The birth of Jesus the Messiah happened like this. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph, but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to disgrace, decided to dismiss her quietly. He had this in mind when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Look, the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,

which means ‘God-is-with-us’. When Joseph woke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took her as his wife.

First Reading

Isaiah 62:1-5

About Zion I will not be silent, about Jerusalem I will not be quiet, until saving justice comes forth for her like a dawning light and her salvation burns up like a torch. The nations will see your saving justice and all kings your glory and you will be called a new name which the mouth of the Lord will bestow. You will be a crown of splendour in the hand of the Lord, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. No more will you be known as ‘Forsaken’ or your land be termed ‘Desolate’; but you will be called ‘My Delight is in her’ and your land ‘The Espoused’; for the Lord will take delight in you and your land shall be espoused. Like a young man marrying a virgin, your rebuilder shall wed you and as the bridegroom rejoices in his bride, so will your God rejoice in you.

Psalm

Psalm 88:4-5, 16-17, 27, 29

‘With my chosen one I have made a covenant. I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants for ever, and set up your throne through all ages.’

How blessed the people who know your praise, who walk, O Lord, in the light of your face, who find their joy all day long in your name,
The birth of Jesus the Messiah happened like this. His mother Mary was betrothed to Joseph; but before they came to live together she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Her husband Joseph, being a righteous man and unwilling to expose her to disgrace, decided to dismiss her quietly. He had this in mind when suddenly an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife because the child conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.’ All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet:

Look, the virgin is with child and will give birth to a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel,

which means ‘God-is-with-us’. When Joseph woke from sleep he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took her as his wife. He had not had intercourse with her when she gave birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.
‘Wonder-Counsellor, Mighty-God, Eternal-Father, Prince-of-Peace’. His rule will be great and there will be no end of peace for the throne of David and his kingdom, secure and established in fair judgement and righteousness. From this time onwards and for ever the jealous love of the LORD Sabaoth will do this.

**PSALM**

**Psalm 95:1–2a, 2b–3, 11–12, 13**

O sing a new song to the LORD; sing to the LORD, all the earth.
O sing to the LORD; bless his name.

Proclaim his salvation day by day. Tell among the nations his glory, and his wonders among all the peoples.

Let the heavens rejoice and earth be glad; let the sea and all within it thunder praise. Let the land and all it bears rejoice. Then will the trees of the wood shout for joy at the presence of the LORD, for he comes, he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness; he will govern the peoples with his truth.

**SECOND READING**

**Titus 2:11–14**

The grace of God our Saviour has been revealed to the whole human race, teaching us that, giving up impiety and all worldly passions, we should be self-restrained and live righteous and religious lives in this present world, waiting for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus. He offered himself for us in order to ransom us from all our faults and to purify a people to be his very own, eager to do good.

**GOSPEL ACCLAMATION**

**Luke 2:10–11**

I bring you good news of great joy, a Saviour has been born to you, Christ the Lord.

**GOSPEL**

**Luke 2:1–14**

Now it happened that at this time a decree came out from Caesar Augustus that a register should be made of the whole world. This registration – the first – took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria, and everyone went to be registered, each to his own town. So Joseph set out from the town of Nazareth in Galilee for Judaea, to David’s town called Bethlehem, since he was of David’s House and line, in order to be registered together with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. Now it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to have her child, and she gave birth to her son, the first-born. She wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the living-space. In that countryside there were shepherds living in the fields keeping the night watch over their flock. An angel of the Lord stood over them and the glory of the Lord shone round them. They were terrified, but the angel said, ‘Do not be afraid. Look, I bring you good news of great joy for the whole people, that today a Saviour has been born to you in the town of David, who is Christ the Lord. And this is a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.’ And suddenly there was with the angel a throng of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:

‘Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among people of good will.’
25 DECEMBER
Dawn Mass

FIRST READING

Isaiah 62:11–12

See, the Lord has proclaimed to the end of the earth:
say to the daughter Zion,
‘See, your salvation is coming.
See, his reward is with him,
his achievement precedes him!’

They shall be called ‘the Holy People’, ‘the redeemed of the Lord’,
and you yourself shall be called ‘Sought-out’, ‘City-not-forsaken’.

PSALM

Psalm 96:1, 6, 11–12

The Lord is king, let earth rejoice;
let the many islands be glad.
The skies proclaim his righteousness;
all peoples see his glory.

Light shines forth for the righteous,
and joy for the upright of heart.
Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous;
to the memory of his holiness give thanks.

SECOND READING

Titus 3:4–7

But when the kindness and love of God our Saviour for humanity were
revealed, not because of any works of righteousness we had ourselves done
but in accordance with his own mercy, he saved us through the washing of
rebirth and renewal in the Holy Spirit which he generously poured over us
through Jesus Christ our Saviour so that, justified by his grace, we should
become heirs in hope of eternal life.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Luke 2:14

Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among people of good will.

GOSPEL

Luke 2:15–20

Now it happened that when the angels had gone from them into heaven,
the shepherds said to one another, ‘Let us go now to Bethlehem and see
this event which the Lord has made known to us.’ So they went in haste
and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they
saw this, they made known what they had been told about this child, and
everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them.
But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart. And
the shepherds went back glorifying and praising God for all they had heard
and seen, just as they had been told.

25 DECEMBER
Mass during the Day

FIRST READING

Isaiah 52:7–10

How lovely on the mountains
are the feet of the messenger announcing peace,
of the messenger of good news, proclaiming salvation
and saying to Zion, ‘Your God is king!’
Your watchmen raise their voices,
shouting for joy together,
for with their own eyes
they have seen the Lord returning to Zion.
Break into shouts of joy together,
you ruins of Jerusalem;
for the Lord has had mercy on his people,
he has redeemed Jerusalem.
The LORD has bared his holy arm
in the sight of all nations,
and all the ends of the earth
have seen the salvation of our God.

PSALM

Psalm 97:1, 2–3a, 3b–4, 5–6

O sing a new song to the LORD,
for he has worked wonders.
His right hand and his holy arm
have brought salvation.

The LORD has made known his salvation,
has shown his deliverance to the nations.
He has remembered his merciful love
and his fidelity to the house of Israel.

All the ends of the earth have seen
the salvation of our God.
Shout to the LORD, all the earth;
break out into joyous song,
and sing out your praise.

Sing psalms to the LORD with the harp,
with the harp and the sound of song,
With trumpets and the sound of the horn,
raise a shout before the King, the LORD.

SECOND READING

Hebrews 1:1–6

In many ways and by many means in the past, God spoke to our ancestors
through the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us in his
Son, whom he appointed heir of all things and through whom he made
the ages. He is the reflection of God’s glory and the imprint of God’s own
being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. Now that he has made
purification for sins, he has taken his seat at the right hand of the Majesty on
high. So he is now far above the angels, as the name which he has inherited
is more excellent than theirs.

For to which of the angels has God ever said:
You are my Son, today I have fathered you,
or:
I shall be as a father to him and he as a son to me?
Again, when he brings the First-born into the world, he says:
Let all the angels of God worship him.

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION (NOT RNJB)

A hallowed day has dawned upon us.
Come, you nations, worship the Lord,
for today a great light has shone down upon the earth.

GOSPEL

John 1:1–5, 9–18

In the beginning was the Word:
The Word was with God
and the Word was God.
He was with God in the beginning.
Through him all things came into being,
not one thing came into being except through him.
What has come into being in him was life,
life that was the light of all people;
and light shines in darkness,
and darkness could not overpower it.

The true light
that gives light to everyone
was coming into the world.
He was in the world
and the world came into being through him,
and the world did not know him.
He came to what was his own
and his own people did not accept him.
But to those who did accept him
he gave power to become children of God,
to those who believed in his name,
who were born not from blood,
or from the will of the flesh,
or from human will
but from God himself.
The Word became flesh, and lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory as of an only-begotten Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.

John witnesses to him and cried out, saying, 'This is the one of whom I said: He who comes after me has passed ahead of me because he was before me.'

Indeed, from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace, for the Law was given through Moses, grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; it is the only-begotten Son, who is close to the Father’s heart, who has made him known.

In 2020 Vatican II and its liturgical renewal may seem to be almost ancient history, yet many of the Council’s goals still need to be fully implemented. This is particularly true when we consider the place of Scripture in the life of the Church. Dei Verbum mandated that ‘easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful.’ Over the past fifty years there have been a proliferation of biblical translations, but unfortunately for many Catholics the Bible remains a closed book. Last September, in his letter Aperuit Illis, Pope Francis warned the Church that ‘the Bible cannot be just the heritage of some, much less a collection of books for the benefit of a privileged few. It belongs above all to those called to hear its message and to recognise themselves in its words. At times, there can be a tendency to monopolise the sacred text by restricting it to certain circles or to select groups. It cannot be that way. The Bible is the book of the Lord’s people, who, in listening to it, move from dispersion and division towards unity. The Word of God unites believers and makes them one people.’

This should help us when we reflect on which translation we adopt for any new edition of the Lectionary. It shouldn’t really surprise anyone that nearly everyone involved in the Church has an opinion on the matter and most have a cherished favourite translation. Indeed, some of those who are reading this booklet probably own a selection of different Bibles, and it is often enlightening to compare a few different translations of a particular biblical verse. However, the fundamental question that has to be answered by the Church today is not which translation any particular person prefers, but which translation is best for the Church as a whole.

Translating the Bible into English isn’t anything new; St Bede the Venerable was translating the Gospel of John into an earlier form of English when he died in 735. The King James Version, published in 1611, is the most significant translation of the Bible ever published. Today, four hundred years later, it is no surprise
that it is dated and unsuitable for general liturgical use. Many of the contemporary biblical translations, such as the RSV, ESV and NRSV, are revisions based on the King James translation.

However, the Revised New Jerusalem Bible does not belong to the King James Version family. Instead it finds its origins in the renewal of biblical studies and spirituality that was present in the Catholic Church leading up to the Second Vatican Council. During the Second World War many Catholics experienced the consolation of the scriptures during the dark days of the war. In particular some French scholars, under the leadership of Éditions du Cerf publishing house in Paris, started work on a new French translation of the Bible. This translation was based on the original biblical languages and not simply on the Latin Vulgate. Fr Roland De Vaux OP, the Director of École Biblique in Jerusalem, a specialist Catholic biblical school founded in 1890, assumed the editorship of this translation project. A one-volume Bible de Jérusalem was published in 1956, taking its name from the location of the École Biblique.

This French translation was very successful and it inspired many similar translations in other languages. Particularly after Vatican II, there was a demand for modern translations for use by Catholics. Fr Alexander Jones edited the original English version of the Jerusalem Bible which was first published in 1966. It was translated by a team of experts, including most famously, the novelist J. R. R. Tolkien. That same year the Bishops of England and Wales approved it for liturgical use and it soon appeared in the Lectionary. The Revised Standard Version was also approved for liturgical use and both versions were adopted in editions of the Lectionary published after Vatican II. However, for various reasons the Jerusalem Bible edition became standard in the vast majority of parishes in Australia, England & Wales, Ireland, New Zealand and Scotland, and to this day it is the biblical translation that nourishes millions of English-speaking Catholics throughout these countries.

However, after fifty years, many consider the Jerusalem Bible to be dated. As far back as 1972, a revision of the translation was initiated. This ran into some complications as Fr Pierre Benoit OP, the copyright holder of the French edition, insisted that only one person could revise the English edition. He successfully convinced the publishers that Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB, a distinguished biblical scholar of Ampleforth Abbey and a former student of the École Biblique, would be the sole translator and editor of any new edition of the Jerusalem Bible in English. As he was working alone the revision took longer than planned and the New Jerusalem Bible was not published until 1985. The NJB was a lot more precise than the original translation. It proved to be a popular study Bible, but it was never adopted for liturgical use. The style of the translation was a little too clinical and technical for popular use. So for the last few years Fr Henry has been working on the newly published Revised New Jerusalem Bible.

This new edition, which has been used in this booklet, is a fully reworked and translated Bible. It is the first full English translation of the Catholic Bible to be published in the Third Millennium. This provides a great opportunity for the Church in those countries that had been using the original Jerusalem Bible.
This new translation retains so many of the familiar cadences and expressions that have nourished churchgoers for the last fifty years. At the same time the RNJB is much more precise than its predecessors. In my opinion, the issue with the original JB is not that it doesn’t read well - it is still very clear - its main problem is that fifty years ago, in the hurry to prepare a new edition after the Council, sometimes the clarity of the original biblical texts was lost and unintentional translation mistakes found their way into the translation adopted for the Lectionary. Today most experts would agree that the Jerusalem Bible Lectionary needs revision. Now the RNJB provides a golden opportunity to preserve so much of the familiar and prepare a new Lectionary that can nourish the next generation of English-speaking Catholics.

Pastoral continuity is a very important aspect of liturgical translation. Fifty years ago, when the first English edition of the Lectionary was prepared, the bishops had to make a simple choice of which biblical translation to adopt for the liturgy. Any suitable translation could have been adopted. However, in 2020 the situation is different. We are not starting from scratch. Therefore, one could almost say that there is an obligation to first consider the current Jerusalem Bible Lectionary and ask whether there is any way to adapt it for contemporary use without causing unnecessary upheaval in the lives of those who worship in our parishes. I believe that this is the main argument for the RNJB. It is not simply that it is the most up-to-date Catholic translation of the Bible in English, nor the fact that it is gender-sensitive or more precise; these arguments could be made for other translations. The main argument is that the Jerusalem Bible is already part of our family and the Revised New Jerusalem Bible keeps that family connection while helping the Church in her mission of bringing Jesus Christ, the Word of God, who is ‘the same today as he was yesterday and as he will be for ever’ to all those who need to hear the Good News.
This booklet contains all the scripture readings from the Sunday Missal for Advent and Christmas 2019 using the text of the RNJB (Revised New Jerusalem Bible). It offers a festive opportunity to ‘try out’ this freshly-published new rendition of the Jerusalem Bible text, to appreciate its improvements on the original and the richness of tone and phrase familiar to all who have grown up worshipping with the JB.

Dom Henry Wansbrough OSB (translator and editor of both the RNJB and the NJB) has written an Introduction to the booklet, and Fr Neil Xavier O’Donoghue of St Patrick’s College, Maynooth, has written an appraisal of the RNJB’s suitability for use in modern liturgical worship.

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