Lectionary is a unique genre of ecclesial literature. While not identical to the Bible, it draws its content from the biblical material. The Lectionary is comprised of passages that are taken out of their original biblical context (decontextualized) and placed within a new literary and liturgical context (recontextualized), thus creating a new ecclesial genre. The recontextualization of former biblical material calls for a way of interpretation that takes into consideration the liturgical character and setting of the Lectionary readings. The actual context of these readings is no longer the original biblical literary context. It is now a liturgical literary context. Each passage must be interpreted within the context created by the liturgical setting. Both historical and literary critical methods of interpretation can continue to be helpful in opening up the meaning of the passages as long as this difference in context is remembered.

In this method of liturgical interpretation the theology of the new context is drawn from the accumulated themes of all of the liturgical readings for that particular year (A, B, or C), rather than simply from general theological themes otherwise associated with a particular season (Ad-
vent, Christmas, Lent, Easter). In a very real sense, the readings of the entire year become the context for the readings of each season and these, in turn, become the context for understanding the individual readings. The following example may serve to illustrate this.

The Easter Season
Throughout the Easter season of Year A, the Church celebrates the membership of the newly initiated people. Within this liturgical context, the texts read during this time constitute a mystagogical catechesis—formative instruction for neophytes. One of the distinctive features of the season is the inclusion of selections from the Acts of the Apostles rather than readings from the First Testament.

The First Reading
Taken together the first readings tell us the story of the early Christian community. This story begins on Easter Sunday itself with the proclamation of the gospel message, an overview of the life of Jesus and the meaning of that life. This is a fitting beginning for the season because it was just such proclamation that planted the seeds of faith which matured into the community of believers. The first reading for the Third Sunday of Easter also contains a gospel proclamation. Though slightly different in style, it interprets the life and death of Jesus from the perspective of ancient Israelite tradition. On the Fourth Sunday we see the fruits of such proclamation. Many Jews heard and heeded the words of the apostles, and the early Christian community grew in number.

The communitarian character of this new family of believers was extraordinary. They prayed together and held possessions in common. When there was internal dissension, they did what was necessary to repair the rift that had been keeping members apart. In accord with the commission that they had received from Jesus, they dared to bring the message of the gospel to distant places in the face of constant danger. Finally, they were assembled together when the Spirit took possession of them, strengthening them with courage and determination.

Psalms
The excerpts that serve as responsorial psalms allow us to express the sentiments that are especially appropriate to this joyous season. At the outset we cry out in thanksgiving for the wondrous blessings that have come to us through the resurrection of Jesus. We realize that it was only through the mercy of God that we have been so blessed. Our gratitude is a recognition of our total dependence. When we reflect on the goodness of God, we sing songs of praise. When our thoughts turn to ourselves, we realize anew our dependence and so our prayers express our trust in God. If God was willing to accomplish the marvel of the resurrection, surely we can trust that God will continue to care for us.

Epistles
The epistle readings, while they extol various aspects of the resurrection, really describe blessings that are enjoyed by Christians because of it. Raised with Christ, our lives are now hidden with Christ in God. For this reason we must cast out any old yeast of malice or darkness. Through the resurrection we have been granted a new birth. We have been saved through the precious blood of Christ. As our shepherd, Christ will lead us to safety and guard us from harm. Through Christ we have been made a chosen race, a royal priesthood. We must be ready to give an explanation for the hope that is in us. Christ is the head of the body which is the Church.
Gospels

The Gospel readings are all resurrection narratives. Beginning with the account of the empty tomb, they lead us first to the locked room into which the Risen Lord came and finally to the scene of the disciples’ reception of the Holy Spirit. In each instance we see doubt and ignorance transformed into Easter faith. We accompany the disciples as they travel to Emmaus where they recognize the Lord in the breaking of the bread. We hear him describe himself as the gate of the sheepfold, and as the way and the truth and the life. He assures his disciples that, despite his ascension to the right hand of God, they will not be left without comfort. On Pentecost, this promise is fulfilled.

Mosaic of Readings

These Easter readings remind us of the overwhelming love that God has for us. Jesus was sent to earth to bring us all to heaven. The resurrection is the triumph of divine power that made this salvation possible, and the community is the place where we continue to experience the effects of this power. The Easter season proclaims aloud the ongoing reality of eschatological fulfillment. Begun at the empty tomb the mystical dynamic continues on the roads of our lives, at the tables where we commune with God and with each other. It dissipates our fears and strengthens our resolve. Easter is the season of unbounded joy, of realized hope, of heartfelt gratitude, and of firm determination.

Conclusion

This is the context which emerges from the themes of the readings of the Easter season for Year A. It is from within this context that we may interpret the specific readings for each Sunday. This method may broaden the possibilities for liturgical preaching.

Reference