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**LITURGY OF THE WORD**

One of the unique aspects of the Easter Vigil is the recounting of the outstanding deeds of the history of salvation. These deeds are related in seven readings from the Old Testament chosen from the law and the prophets and two readings from the New Testament, namely from the apostles and from the gospel. Thus, the Lord “beginning with Moses and all the prophets” (Lk 24.27, 44-45) meets us once again on our journey and, opening up our minds and hearts, prepares us to share in the breaking of the bread and the drinking of the cup. The faithful are encouraged to meditate on these readings by the singing of a responsorial psalm, followed by a silent pause, and then by the celebrant’s prayer. The new *Missale Romanum* adds a sentence about the nine readings proposed, saying that “all of these must be read whenever it can be done, so that the character of a Vigil which takes place over some duration of time can be observed” (EV, no. 20).

The new *Missale* recognizes that “nevertheless, where grave pastoral circumstances demand it, the number of readings from the Old Testament may be reduced (EV, no 21). At least three readings from the Old Testament should be read always including Exodus 14 (EV, no. 21). The reference found previously in the *Missale* to the possibility of having only two Old Testament readings in extreme necessity is omitted.

The *Missale* is very specific about the priest singing the Alleluia before the Gospel: “After the Epistle has been read, all rise, and the priest solemnly intones the Alleluia three times, raising his voice a step each time. All repeat the Alleluia each time. If necessary, the psalmist intones the Alleluia. Mention is then made of the psalmist or cantor singing Psalm 117 and the people responding, “Alleluia” (EV, no. 34). This psalm is often recited by the apostles in their Easter preaching (Acts 4.11-12; Mt 21.42; Mk 12.10; Lk 20.17).

The *Missale* directs explicitly that the homily, even if it is brief, is not to be omitted (EV, no.36). This requires that the homilist carefully prepare and craft the homily so that it captures the tremendous mysteries being celebrated on this most holy of nights.

