

Liturgy of the Word

After our great celebration of St. Thérèse last weekend, we return to our little series on the Mass. Last time we talked about the Introductory Rite (e.g., Entrance, Sign of the Cross, Greeting, Penitential Act, Gloria, and Opening Collect). Now, we move into the first major part of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Word.

First, let me say a brief word about Sacred Scripture in general. Specifically, the Catechism says, *"In Sacred Scripture, the Church constantly finds her nourishment and her strength, for she welcomes it not as a human word, 'but as what it really is, the word of God.' In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet his children, and talks with them."* (CCC 104)

Sacred Scripture is "food for the soul." Just as physical food nourishes our body, so God's Word nourishes our souls. In listening to and reading Sacred Scripture, we allow God to speak to us. St. Thérèse remarked that oftentimes she would read spiritual writers and become discouraged because their thoughts were so lofty. Then she would turn to Sacred Scripture and find nourishment. At every Mass, our heavenly Father desires to meet us and speak with us in the Sacred Scripture.

Overall, the Mass readings are meant to walk you through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They correspond to a particular liturgical season (e.g., Advent, Christmas, Ordinary Time, Lent, Easter, etc.) or a liturgical feast (e.g. Trinity Sunday, Corpus Christi, a saint, etc.). The liturgical calendar is somewhat akin to a family that celebrates significant moments such as birthdays and anniversaries.

On Sundays, there are three readings and a psalm. Typically, the first reading is drawn from the Old Testament (except during the Easter season). The Old Testament lays the foundation for knowing the story of Jesus. In this light, think of a movie. If you only saw the end without knowing what preceded it, you would be lost. The same is true for God's plan of salvation.

Next comes the Responsorial Psalm, which is our response to the first reading. We respond not with our own words, but God's. The responsorial psalm is meant to be reflective and conducive for meditation on the first reading. Granted, this can be difficult when little ones have lots of energy!

The second reading, which follows the psalm, comes from the New Testament. It is from one of the epistles (i.e., letters), the Acts of the Apostles, or the book of Revelation. Many times, the second reading focuses on the mystery of Jesus and His saving work. It also highlights what this saving work means for our lives.

Finally, there is the gospel where we have a posture change. We move from sitting to standing, which symbolizes readiness and displays honor. When an important person such as the pope or president enters the room, people stand. The same is true for the gospel.

As the gospel book is processed, the faithful sing "Alleluia," which means, "Praise the Lord!" We praise God for His work of salvation and announce that Christ is coming to us in the gospel. The priest approaches the altar and says quietly, "Cleanse my heart and lips almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel." The prayer reminds us of Isaiah's lips that needed to be cleansed before proclaiming the Word of the Lord to Israel (Is. 6:1-9).

After processing to the ambo, the priest greets the people and proclaims the gospel. Remember, it is God Himself who speaks to His people! We do just not listen about Jesus in history (e.g., what He said and did), but rather what He is currently doing in our lives. For example, when He says, "*Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand*," (Mt. 4:17) He is speaking to *us*!

Practically speaking, I provide two suggestions. First, try to get into the habit of reading the daily Mass readings. Your soul needs spiritual nourishment each day. I provide a little reflection on the daily Mass readings on our parish website under "Mass" and "Mass Reflections."

Second, read over the Sunday Mass readings before coming to Mass. Athletes, actors, and actresses prepare extensively before games and shows. If this is true for them, how much more true is it for us who worship God and hear His Word in the Mass! May God open your hearts and minds as He speaks to you in His Word in the Mass.

Next week, we will look at the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the second major part of the Mass.

Goldy Studying God's Word

