

LITURGY OF THE WORD

After the Introductory Rites, which have served to prepare the assembly to listen to God's word and to celebrate the Eucharist, everyone is invited to sit and to listen attentively. It is a time for listening to God speaking to us in our time and in this gathering. It is a time to recall God's wondrous deeds, to celebrate that this God wants to communicate with his people and meet them in eucharist.

This first major part of the Mass, called the Liturgy of the Word, is not less a celebration than its second part, the Liturgy of the Eucharist. God is already present among his people, and now speaks and reveals himself through his word in Sacred Scripture. This is not an ancient word, but one that he addresses now to this assembled people; a word whose meaning is never exhausted even after innumerable repetitions, a word which should occasion an immediate response in silence, song, and earnest prayer. The Liturgy of the Word is thus a dialogue: a dialogue between God and his people. God speaks; we respond.

Before examining the various elements of the Liturgy of the Word, let us consider what the Church teaches about the Liturgy of the Word.

"When the scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and it is Christ, present in his word, who proclaims the Gospel." (General

Instruction of the Roman Missal, GIRM no 9).

Today the Church uses much more Scripture at Mass than was formerly the case. All Sundays and certain feasts have three readings: one from the Old Testament, one from among the writings of the Apostles and the Gospel. There are even three cycles of readings for Sundays of the year. These are called the year of Matthew, the year of Mark and the year of Luke (A, B, and C).

The First Reading is usually taken from the Old Testament (the Hebrew Scriptures). But during Eastertime the Acts of the Apostles is read so that we can see how the early Church gave witness to the Paschal Mystery.

This reading prepares us to listen to the Gospel as it often corresponds to it as prophecy and its fulfilment.

A period of silence follows the reading to allow the assembly to reflect on what has been proclaimed and to ask the help of God to do his will.

Psalm Response A psalm traditionally, follows the first reading. It is normally sung, for singing helps the word to sink deeper into our consciousness and gives the assembly the opportunity to respond to God's word with reflective prayer or praise. Even when a cantor sings the psalm, the whole assembly sings the acclamatory response or antiphon.

Second Reading Formerly called the "epistle" (even when not a letter), this is a New Testament text and is always given as the second reading on Sundays and major feasts. Usually it is quite independent from the other two readings, but during certain seasons, passages have been selected to correspond with the mystery being celebrated at a particular time of the liturgical year (eg. Christmas time).

In the second reading the assembly encounters the early Church living its Christian faith.

Alleluia / Gospel Acclamation The Hebrew "Alleluia" means "Praise God"— and is an acclamation of paschal joy. It accompanies the gospel procession when the whole assembly praises Christ who comes to proclaim the good news of salvation.

Gospel The Church teaches that the Good News of salvation is proclaimed by the Risen Lord. It is Christ living and present among his own and who continues to speak to them and calls them to faith and conversion.

The Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. Therefore many special and very old signs of solemnity and veneration for the gospel are used: a Gospel procession is accompanied by candles and incense, the book is kissed, small signs of the cross are made (on the book, on our forehead, mouth and heart), and acclamations are sung or said before and after the reading.

As early as the fourth century, the assembly began standing as a sign of respect and alertness in the presence of the Risen Lord.

The presider proclaims the gospel, if there is no deacon or other priest participating.

The **Homily** is an integral part of the liturgy. The homilist points out and proclaims how God is present and continues to act and speak to his people today.

Through the homily the members of the assembly are called to become a holy people so that they can better celebrate the Eucharist and offer themselves with and through Christ in the Eucharistic Prayer.

The Credo is a communal, corporate expression of faith in the great story of salvation. The assembly responds and gives its assent to the word of God proclaimed in the scriptures and preached in the homily.

General Intercessions (Prayer of the Faithful) is also an integral part of the liturgy. Having heard the word, the assembled people respond and: "*exercise their priestly function by interceding for all mankind*" (GIRM no. 45).

The entire people of God form a "royal priesthood" and, in union with Christ and under the presidency of the priest, make "petitions, prayers, intercessions ... for all" (1 Tim. 2:1).

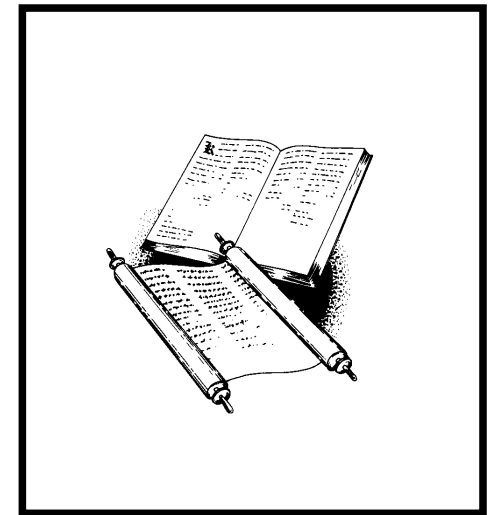
The Liturgy of the Word is not just a preparation for the Celebration of Eucharist. A profound relationship exists between the two since the word of God and the bread of life are two aspects of the same mystery.

The Church teaches that Jesus is the living word, the revelation of the Father. He is also the bread of life, the nourishment of his people. There is one personal self-giving. The liturgy of the word and the liturgy of the eucharist form but one single act of worship.

The Church has always venerated the divine Scriptures just as she venerates the body of the Lord, since from the table of both the word of God and of the body of Christ she unceasingly receives and offers to the faithful the bread of life, especially in the sacred liturgy (Constitution on Divine Revelation, art. 21).

UNDERSTANDING THE MASS

Liturgy of the Word



...so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

Isaiah 55.11

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