

### **Script – Episode 3 – The Liturgy of the Word**

The Word of God is proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word. Before we are fed with the body of Our Lord at the table of the Eucharist, we are nourished first from the table of Holy Scripture. The Word of God is presented to us with "The Word of the Lord" in the same way that the Eucharist is presented to us with the words "The Body of Christ".

Just as there is a communion and bond achieved by the reception of the Eucharist, so too, there is by our reception of the Word of God. And just as we receive the Body of Christ with care lest any bit of it falls from our hand to the ground, we should be just as careful not to let slip from our hearts the Word of God.

The First Reading is chosen because it relates to the Gospel Reading of the day and we should pay special attention to it in anticipation of the Gospel. We respond to the First Reading with "Thanks be to God". Indeed we are truly blessed and grateful that God is willing to reveal his presence to us, to speak to us and share his life with us.

Next we pray the Responsorial Psalm, so called, because it responds to the First Reading. This connection helps us to continue to meditate on what God is telling us through His Word. Normally a cantor will sing the Psalm and we respond with a refrain taken from the Psalm that resonates the main message of the First Reading.

The Psalms were used in the time of Jesus in worship services. It is the prayer of Jesus and His Body, the Church. When we pray the Psalm, we pray through Him, with Him and in Him.

In the Second Reading, we hear of the problems and the progress of the early Church, how they struggled to be faithful to the Gospel amid a hostile pagan culture and even persecution. Through this reading, we become more aware that our fellowship is not just with Christians in our parish, or even in our time. It is universal and it embraces all people of the world, at every period of the Church's history. We are still living in the Church described in the apostles' letters and we want to be as faithful as that first generation, even as we are undergoing our own trials and opposition.

For the first two readings and the Psalm, we are seated to signify our receptiveness to God's Word. For the Gospel, however, we stand to recognise the arrival of the great King, Jesus, in the words of the Gospel.

While the whole Scripture is inspired, Vatican II taught that the Gospels rightly have "a special place .. because they are our principal source to the life and

teaching of the Incarnate Word, our savior." The Mass reflects this eminence by showing special reverence to the reading of the Gospel.

We sing "Alleluia", which is a Hebrew expression of joy meaning "Praise the Lord!" The Book of the Gospels is held aloft and carried in procession to the pulpit by the priest. This is done with great solemnity, for the words we are about to hear are the words of Jesus Christ, the Word of God. To prepare himself for the sacred task of reading the Gospel, the priest quietly prays: "*Cleanse my heart and my lips, Almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel*".

After a greeting, the priest announces the Gospel reading and traces the sign of the cross on his forehead, mouth, breast and on the book. We also make the three-fold sign of the cross over ourselves, a ritual by which we consecrate our thoughts, words and actions to the Lord, asking that his Word in the Gospel be always on our minds, on our lips, and in our heart.

This is the most sacred moment of the Liturgy of the Word. The proclamation of the Gospel makes Jesus' life present to us in a profound way. He is present in the midst of the assembly. We are not mere spectators hearing about what Jesus once said and did a long time ago. Christ is now speaking personally to each one of us. We should pay careful attention by leaning forward and listening intently to receive the unique message that God intends for us.

We hear God's Word addressing our concerns and our life. Certain passages may seem to jump out at us as we listen. "Why do they seem especially meaningful to me? Lord, what does this text say to me? What is it about my life that you want to change by this text? What troubles me about this text? What is it about this text that moves or attracts me? What should I do in response to what I have heard? What is that one thought that I can take home to reflect and act on?"

A good practice is to read the Mass readings beforehand, even if it is just before the start of the Mass. In this way, we can better listen when the readings are being proclaimed and it is more likely that we will truly hear what God wishes to say to us.

At the end of the Gospel proclamation, the priest kisses the Book of Gospels, then holds it aloft as he announces to us what we have heard is the "Gospel of the Lord". We answer by giving praise to our Lord - "*Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ*" - for all He has done for us, not only in revealing God to us, but in opening the way of salvation for us.

The homily of the Mass is a liturgical act, an integral part of Christian worship. The word homily means "explanation" in Greek. Its purpose is to explain the biblical texts and apply their message to the present day. It helps us to interpret

Scriptures and to truly hear it as God's word addressed to us in our times and circumstances. Jesus constantly explained the Scriptures to His disciples and they in turn continued to do so to those to whom they preached after Jesus' Ascension.

The homily takes up once more the dialogue which God has already established with us. Listening to a homily is very much like listening to the Scriptures. It requires our whole attention. Our conviction is that it is God who seeks to reach out to us through the priest and that God is displaying his power through human words.

We then stand to profess our faith. The creed is a concise summary of the history of our salvation - from creation through Christ's Incarnation, Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension, all the way to His coming again "to judge the living and the dead". It expresses what is most central and fundamental to the faith of the Church. But it is not a rote recital of doctrines. When we profess our beliefs, we express our readiness to be God's people, our desire to grow in our faith to God and to live in a way that is worthy of the faith we are proclaiming.

The Liturgy of the Word culminates in intercessory prayers known as the "Prayer of the Faithful". In baptism, each and every Christian receives a share in Christ's priesthood. Living in Christ, we stand as a mediator between God and the world, offering "supplications, prayers, petitions for everyone." When we raise our prayer on behalf of the entire human family during Mass, we are exercising our priestly function.

The Prayers of the Faithful also bring to mind the last part of the creed: "We believe in one holy catholic and apostolic Church". We are all part of the Body of Christ that extends across the world and also includes those who have gone before us and now live in Christ. The prayers are therefore universal in scope and the intercessions train us to look not only after our own interests but also to the interests of others especially the poor, the sick and those oppressed by any burden. We, as disciples of Christ, have complete trust that we can make a difference in the world by offering our prayers to God.

*Congregation : "Lord, Hear Our Prayer."*