

# LITURGY OF THE WORD

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## Introduction

The Liturgy of the Word is principally made up of readings from Sacred Scripture together with chants. In the readings, the table of God's word is spread before the assembly on an ambo and the treasures of the Bible are opened. The homily, Profession of Faith, and Prayer of the Faithful or Universal Prayer develop and culminate this part of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. As such, the proclamation should not be done hastily. It is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence (GIRM 55, 56). For the purposes of this insert, the Liturgy of the Word can be divided into four sections; biblical readings and acclamations, homily, Profession of Faith, and the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful.

## The Biblical Readings and Acclamations

In the readings, God speaks to his people, opening up the mystery of redemption and salvation and offering spiritual nourishment. Christ himself is present in the midst of those gathered through his Word. In the responses to the proclaimed Word, silence and singing, all gathered digest God's word and make it their own. Typically, this reading is from the Old Testament except during Easter time when the record of the early Christians, the Acts of the Apostles, is proclaimed. The first reading is offered at the ambo, which is reserved for the proclamation of Sacred Scripture.

Following the first reading, the responsorial Psalm is also proclaimed from the ambo. Mirroring the practices of the Jewish synagogue, the gathered community replies to the Scripture with a psalm. The selection of the psalms in the lectionary follows general principles. The psalm might be chosen if the Scripture of the day quotes the same psalm, if a literary reference is made to the psalm, or if the psalm clearly illustrates the content of the Scripture. Accordingly, the psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. The psalms reflect an array of sensibilities as we hear lament, contrition, thanksgiving, praise and petition.

The second reading comes from the letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, or the Book of Revelation. In particular, the season of Ordinary Time is a continuous reading through the letters of the New Testament, week after week. There is no deliberate correspondence between the second reading and the other readings.

After the first and second readings, the acclamation, "The Word of the Lord," is said or chanted by the lector, paralleling the Latin. The gathered people reply, "Thanks be to God," honoring the word of God that they have received in faith and with grateful hearts.

The acclamation before the proclamation of the Gospel is a special rite by which the assembly of the faithful prepares to welcome and greet the Lord who is about to speak to them in the Gospel. It is sung by all while standing. The Alleluia traces back to our Jewish roots and is best translated as praising God. Between the sung Gospel acclamation is a scriptural verse taken from the lectionary, also called the Roman Gradual. This verse is sung by the cantor or choir. During Lent, the verse before the Gospel is sung, or another tract or text is sung, in place of the Alleluia. For example and in some cases, the text "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory" is sung. If the acclamation before the Gospel is not sung, it may be omitted, all the while maintaining the appropriate pace established so that the Gospel is not proclaimed hastily, but deliberately.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word and set apart marked from the other readings with special marks of honor:

- the minister appointed to proclaim it prepares himself by a blessing or prayer;
- the people stand as they listen to it being read and, through their response, acknowledge and confess Christ is present and speaking to them;
- marks of reverence (e.g. bowing to the book, kissing the book) are given to the Book of the Gospels; and
- the dialogue between the priest or deacon (when present) and the people is generally sung, giving a heightened solemnity to this moment.

### **The Homily**

The homily is part of the Liturgy of the Word and it is considered necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be about some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture, of another text from the Ordinary, or from the Proper texts of the Mass of the day. The homilist should take into account the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners so to apply the Scripture to the life and times of the assembly. The homilist is always a priest or deacon.

### **The Profession of Faith**

In the “Symbol of the Apostles,” “Profession of Faith,” or “Creed,” the whole gathered people respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily. We call to mind and confess the great mysteries of faith by reciting the rule of faith handed on to us from the Apostles before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist. The Creed is to be sung or said by all on Sundays and Solemnities. It may also be used on important Feast days. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, the Apostles Creed may be used so that the assembly can join their voices with the baptismal symbol of the Roman Church. It is also noteworthy that some of the more significant word changes for the people occur in the new and more faithful translation of the Creed from the Latin.

### **The Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful**

In the Prayer of the Faithful, the gathered assembly responds to the Word of God which is welcomed in faith. Through the office of the baptismal priesthood, prayers are offered to God for the salvation of all. As a rule, the series of intentions are ordered as listed below:

- for the needs of the Church;
- for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; and
- for the local community.

### **Conclusion**

In the Liturgy of the Word we have had an intimate encounter with the Living Word of God. The faith of our ancestors acknowledges the presence of the Lord Jesus. The assembly today experiences that same presence and the gift of Christ himself.