



Fr. Daniel's Corner

Mass Moment: Part 14

The Proclamation of the Gospel

Special reverence is paid to the Gospel book that was carried in. It is again held aloft, acclaimed, and incensed to remind us and to celebrate that Christ speaks to us when the Gospel is proclaimed (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, no. 7). The Gospel in general is the good news of Jesus, it is the story of the one who is *risen* indeed. So, each time we hear any part of the Gospel on any given day, it is our way, our entry that day into the whole mystery of the Resurrection. The Gospel recounts the life of Christ, his many memorable words and encounters with others, his marvelous parables, the signs (miracles) he performed and his fellowship with sinners (Lk 15:2).

The four Gospels- Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John- provide useful theological points to its first faith communities, and of course to us, the modern readers/hearers. The four writers agree on the center and climax of the story. It is always the death and Resurrection of Jesus. Whatever is told is part of this story and helps us to deepen our grasp of it. Thus, the proclamation of the Gospel is a mystery. A good way to understand a mystery is when it is LIVED AND ENCOUNTERED. Through the Gospel, therefore, something is happening even now! Jesus visits the gathered assembly in a very concrete form, speaking to us those same words, working this miracle, telling this parable, eating and drinking with sinners. But it does not matter which portion of the Gospel is read on a particular Sunday because each portion leads us towards the center.

His death and Resurrection, according to John the Evangelist, is his "hour" (Jn 12:23). His hour is an hour that never dies, never fades into the past, never grows stale or old with the passage of time. So, his hour is what is happening when the Gospel is read. The power of the Gospel event travels as it were from the past to our present in reading/listening what Jesus said and did. This event is divided into three cycles: A, B, and C for Sunday readings. Cycle A relies on Matthew. Cycle B on Mark. Cycle C on Luke. All three of the cycles also draw from St. John's Gospel. The weekdays draw from all the Gospels.

The Gospel is always read by a deacon or a priest, or by the bishop himself if there are no other ordained ministers present at the Eucharist where he presides. The minister (bishop, priest or deacon) who proclaims the Gospel first invites the people with the words; "*The Lord be with you*"- a reminder of whose presence they are in and who is about to speak to them; the Lord Himself. The people respond as usual, "*and with your spirit.*" He then introduces the Gospel; "*A reading from the Holy Gospel according to ...*" He traces the sign of the cross on the face of the Book of the Gospel and with the people also makes the sign of the cross on his forehead, on his lips and on his chest. In this gesture, the entire church asks the Lord to open our minds to receive His word, to open our lips to proclaim the message we receive and to let this same word live in our hearts. When the proclamation of the Gospel is concluded, the minister says; "*The Gospel of the Lord.*" In gratitude the entire church responds, "*Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ.*"

If a bishop is present, the Book of the Gospel is brought to him to be kissed. Otherwise the priest and deacon kiss it in veneration on behalf of the gathered assembly. The minister prays inaudibly while kissing it, "*May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins.*" Reserving the proclamation of the Gospel to the ordained reminds us that the Gospel expresses apostolic faith in a preeminent way. Since the Gospel is not unrelated to the rest of the scriptures, which have been read by some of the baptized but not ordained members of the community, the rule (of having an ordained minister read the Gospel) is an implicit reminder that all the scriptures are read and understood under the authority of apostolic faith. The bishop and anyone whom he has ordained are meant to represent this apostolic guarantee.

And that is your Mass Moment for the week.