The Meaning of the Mass: Part Eleven
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LITURGY OF THE WORD

We believe that the scriptures are a living word. They are the very word of salvation. They don’t simply report to us what has happened in the past. They are a testament to God’s enduring salvific intention for his people. As we hear the Word of God proclaimed in our midst, we are hearing God’s saving intention for us in the here and now. What has happened is now happening. God is speaking to us. The proclamation is a moment of theophany (God speaking to us.) We are with Abraham as he walks with the Lord. We are with Moses on the mountaintop. We are with Elijah as he hears that small still whisper. We are walking with Jesus and his disciples. God is speaking to us the message of salvation. And this message is intended to direct our very lives. For we know that the scriptures are inerrant when it comes to faith and morals. God does not change his mind. And the scriptures have remained uncorrupted by the power of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, what was spoken before and has remained in the scriptures we can trust to be the one and only truth, and the only truth that can lead to salvation. For Jesus is the only truth and all of the scriptures Old and New lead us to Christ.

We also must realize—as Ecclesiastes tells us—that there is nothing new under the sun. The power of the scriptures is found in the fact that they are multivalent, in other words, they can be interpreted in multiple ways. There is no one single way to interpret the scriptures, which is why we consider them a living word. They can still speak to our lives by the power of the Holy Spirit. What is happening in our lives now has happened before, and God has told us how to deal with it. As God’s word is proclaimed, it is made effective in our hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit. We do have a guide, though, to help us discern the meaning of the scriptures, for we can never interpret them in a way contrary to the teachings of the Church. The Holy Spirit has preserved the teachings of the Church from ever going into error. The scriptures are intended to set our hearts on fire, in order to live out the truths we hear and lead others to that same experience.

We are called to celebrate the timelessness of God’s promises and to remember that, whether the Scriptures are from the Old Testament or New Testament, it is the saving Christ who is made known to us. We are called then to listen through the Spirit in order to interpret the scriptures in accord with our lives. We must open ourselves to exactly the life we are being called to live through God’s saving proclamation. We need to understand that we are being prepared for the celebration of the Eucharist, where we will experience the fullness of our salvation and be strengthened to live out what we have just heard in the context of our lives.

It is essential for us to hear and be open to all of the readings proclaimed, but the Liturgy of the Word reaches its high point in the proclamation of the Gospel. For Christ commissioned his Apostles and his Church to bring the Gospel to the whole world. Christ is truly present in his Word—proclaimed, heard, and lived in the lives of his followers. Celebrating the Good News leads naturally to offering thanks to God, which is exactly what “eucharist” means.