

## **9b – Pew Book Liturgy of the Word**

Last week we talked in general terms about the Liturgy of the Word. As you recall, in the Liturgy of the Word God speaks directly to each of us. That's why sometimes you may be struck by something a little different than others. The readings we hear at Mass are arranged in a certain order based upon the Liturgical Year. If you were to attend Mass every day you would hear most of the Bible read every three years. On Sundays and Holy Days there are usually four Scripture passages that are read.

### **The First Reading**

The First Reading always relates directly to the Gospel. It's taken from the Old Testament (except during the Easter Season when it's from the Acts of the Apostles). The first reading usually illustrates the continuity or sometimes a contrast between the Old and the new covenant – or show how something in the Old Testament prefigures Christ and the Church. After hearing it, we say together, "Thanks be to God" This is a statement of amazement that God should speak in our midst. We don't take it for granted.

### **The Responsorial Psalm**

By the third century psalms were sung or recited at every Mass. The psalms, as you may know, are a collection of poems, hymns and prayers. The psalms were sung in Israel's Temple in Jerusalem with two alternating choirs with an antiphonal phrase sung before and after it. The early Church quickly incorporated this approach into the Mass.

### **The Second Reading**

The Second Reading comes from the New Testament--typically one of the Letters, or Acts or the Book of Revelation. It's usually not directly related to either

the first reading or the Gospel but it does reflect on the mystery of Jesus Christ and our lives. It's often a continuous reading in that what we hear this week continues from last week's second reading and what we will hear next week is a continuation of this weeks.

### **The Gospel Acclamation, the Gospel Procession and the Triple Sign of the Cross.**

During the opening procession the lector places the book of the Gospels on the altar. When it's time to read the Gospel there is a second procession from the altar to the ambo.

The word, "Alleluia" is one of two Hebrew words that we still have in our liturgy. The other is "Amen." The Hebrew alleluia means, "praise God." Amen, means "I agree" or simply, "Yes."

Before the Procession to the ambo, the priest bows to the altar, which as you may recall represents Christ, and says the prayer, "Almighty God, cleanse my heart and my lips so that I may worthily proclaim your Gospel." If the Deacon reads the Gospel, he receives this blessing from the priest.

Once at the Ambo, he places the Gospel Book on the ambo, gives the usual greeting and then says, "A reading from the Holy Gospel according to "n," to which we all respond, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ." Notice that we address the Lord because it is the Lord who speaks to us through the Gospel.

Then, the priest, using his thumb makes the sign of the cross on the Gospel and then he makes a small sign of the cross on his forehead, his lips, and over his heart. If you look around you may notice that many others in the church doing the same. The words that accompany this pious gesture are, "May the Word of the Lord be in my mind, on my lips and in my heart."

## **The Gospel**

You may already know that the word “Gospel” means “good news” and that there are four Gospels. Each of the Gospels was written by an evangelist, which is a Greek word meaning, “bringer of good news.” The four evangelists are: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of them gathered together what they had experienced, what others had said and what had been written about Jesus. They then arranged their gospels in a unique way to meet the needs of the particular group of people to whom it was to be read. Therefore, while each of the Gospels, especially the first three (Matthew, Mark and Luke), are very similar about how these “facts” are arranged, the point they are making are different in significant ways. However, each Gospel makes the essential point that Jesus is the Son of God and the savior of the world (Messiah).

## **Special Signs of Honor that Surround the Gospel**

From the earliest times special signs of honor have been given to the Gospels that emphasize their importance. For example, we stand when the Gospel is proclaimed. Standing in the early church was a sign of respect. Even today we often stand up when a guest or an important person enters the room.

An additional mark of honor is that sometimes altar servers with candles will accompany the procession of the Book of the Gospels from the altar to the ambo and the priest may incense the Gospel before reading it.

Another sign of importance is that someone in major Orders must proclaim the Gospel: a deacon or priest. At the end of the proclamation the priest or deacon says, “The Gospel of the Lord.” The people respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ” We are speaking to the Word of God when we say, “Praise to you, Lord, Jesus Christ.

Finally, the priest kisses the Gospel at the end of the reading. As he does so he prays, “May the words of the Gospel wipe away our sins.”

The power of the Gospel is profound since it is the Word of God. It gives us faith, it shows us how to live and it has the power to wipe away our sins. That's why we give the reading of the gospel so much respect.