

Lesson 9 A

The Liturgy of the Word

Last week we talked about the opening prayer or collect (colic). As you may recall the Collect – said after the Gloria – is a prayer to God the Father that sets the tone for the rest of the Mass. It's also a good time for us to gather together all our personal intentions for the Mass and present them to the Lord.

Today and for the next couple weeks we are going to talk about the Liturgy of the Word.

There are two main parts of the Mass: The Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. God's word opens up for us the reality of God and in the Eucharist God himself is present to us.

In the Liturgy of the Word God speaks personally to each one of us. This is a matter not to be taken lightly. Recall that when the people of Israel were to hear God's word on Mount Sinai they fasted and prepared themselves for 3 days. At Mass, we have the Introductory Rites to prepare us, i.e., the Sign of the Cross, the Confiteor, the Kyrie, Gloria and Collect.

Just as we celebrate family through birthdays, anniversaries so we as a Church family celebrate major events in the Church every year. We call this the Liturgical Year: Advent (Old Testament longing for the savior); Christmas (rejoicing in Christ's incarnation); Lent (we prepare to enter Christ's passion of Holy Week), Easter (we celebrate Jesus' resurrection and ascension), Ordinary Time (Jesus' public ministry). Then, throughout the year we have special celebrations to recall special events, e.g., Corpus Christi, All Saints, Holy Trinity, etc.

Some people wrongly think that Catholics don't consider the Bible very important and so don't read it. They couldn't be more wrong. Most of the prayers

and responses in Mass are taken directly from the Bible and the readings that we hear in the Liturgy of the Word are all from the Bible. In point of fact, it was the early Catholic Fathers of the Church who gathered together and chose the readings that we call the Bible!

The Bible readings that we hear at Mass are arranged around a three-year cycle. If you went to Mass every day you would hear most of the Bible read every three years.

Traditionally, a lay reader, known as a lector, reads the first three readings from Scripture. The Gospel is read by the priest or a deacon. If a lector isn't able to read the other reading, then the priest or deacon also does the other readings.

During the Sunday Mass, four different readings are read from the Bible. In the homily, the priest, explains and hopefully makes more meaningful the riches that were contained in one or more of the readings.

The order of the readings in the lectionary (the liturgical book that contains the biblical readings) must be followed exactly so as to best show the connection between the New and the Old Testaments. It is not permitted to substitute or add to any of the scriptural readings with non-biblical texts- either secular or religious- even if they are very beautiful and meaningful.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word and the greatest respect is shown to it. That is why we process into the church holding the Book of the Gospels up high and why the priest kisses the gospel after he proclaims it to the assembly. It is traditional to incense the gospel before proclaiming it.

Next time we'll explain the reason for the arrangement for each of the readings.

“In the middle, let the reader stand upon some high place: let him read the books of Moses, of Joshua the son of Nun, of the

Judges, and of the Kings and of the Chronicles, and those written after the return from the captivity; and besides these, the books of Job and of Solomon and of the sixteen prophets.”

Apostolic Constitutions, 400 AD

“For as long as there is time, the Memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read. Then, when the reader has finished, the presider verbally gives a warning and appeal for the imitation of these good examples” St. Justin Martyr, 155 AD