



Parts of the Mass | The Liturgy of the Word

Material adapted from www.USCCB.org

After the Introductory Rites of the Mass, the assembly's attention turns to the word of God.

"When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel." (GIRM, no. 29)

These words from the [General Instruction of the Roman Missal](#) (GIRM) challenge us with a profound truth that we need to reflect on and take to heart. The words of Sacred Scripture are not like any other texts we will ever hear. They not only give us information, but they are the way God reveals himself to us. Through the scripture, we come to know of God's unconditional love for us and we also learn about the responsibilities involved in being true disciples. The Word of God proclaimed in the liturgy has a special sacramental power to bring about in us what it proclaims. It not only tells us of God and God's desires for us, it also helps us to renew our own commitment to live the gospel every day.

Most of the Liturgy of the Word is [readings from Scripture](#). On Sundays and solemnities, there are three Scripture readings. During most of the year, the first reading is from the Old Testament and the second reading is from one of the New Testament letters. During Easter Time, the first reading is from the Acts of the Apostles that tells the story of the Church in its earliest days. The last reading is always from one of the four Gospels.

The Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. The readings from the Old Testament tell us about God's promises and the preparation of his people for the coming of his Son. The epistles and other pre-Gospel New Testament readings offer the reflections of St. Paul and other contemporaries of the Lord on the life and message of Christ. In the Acts of the Apostles we have an account of the early Church.

We believe that all Scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit, but the Church has always given special honor to the Gospel because in the Gospel we have the words and deeds of Christ himself. The proclamation of the Gospel is marked with signs of respect and honor. The Book of the Gospels is carried high in the entrance procession and placed on the altar until the Gospel reading to show the unity of Scripture and Eucharist. All stand for the proclamation of the Gospel, a posture that pays homage to Christ who is present in the Word. The deacon, or, when no deacon is present a priest, reads the Gospel. Just before the proclamation of the Gospel, the Gospel book is carried in procession to the ambo accompanied by a sung acclamation. The book may be incensed before the reading and is kissed at its conclusion.

After the Scripture readings, the celebrant (or assisting deacon) [preaches the homily](#). In the homily, the preacher focuses on the Scripture texts or some other texts from the liturgy, drawing from them lessons that may help us to live better lives, more faithful to Christ's call to grow in holiness.



Usually the Profession of Faith follows the homily, either the Nicene or Apostles' Creed. The [Nicene Creed](#) is a statement of faith dating from the fourth century, while the Apostles' Creed is the ancient baptismal creed of the Church in Rome. If baptismal promises are renewed, from a formula based on the Apostles' Creed, this takes the place of the Creed.

The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the [Universal Prayer](#), also called the Prayer of the Faithful. The gathered assembly intercedes with God on behalf of the Church, the world, and themselves, entrusting their needs to the faithful and loving God.

Prepare

What, then, must we do to properly receive the Word of God proclaimed at Mass? The *General Instruction* tells us that "the readings from the Word of God are to be listened to reverently by everyone" (no. 29), and it provides that those who read the Scriptures at Mass must be "truly suited to carrying out this function and carefully prepared, so that by their hearing the readings from the sacred texts the faithful may conceive in their hearts a sweet and living affection for Sacred Scripture" (no. 101).

Perhaps the best way to understand the readings at Mass and our response to them is offered by Saint John Paul II in his Instruction [Dies Domini](#). . . . He encourages "those who take part in the Eucharist—priest, ministers and faithful... to prepare the Sunday liturgy, reflecting beforehand upon the word of God which will be proclaimed" and adds that if we do not, "it is difficult for the liturgical proclamation of the word of God alone to produce the fruit we might expect" (no. 40). In this way we will till the soil, preparing our minds and hearts to receive the seeds planted by the Word of God so that seed may bear fruit.

Celebrate

The key to the liturgy of the word is listening. We are called to listen attentively as the reader, deacon or priest proclaims God's Word. Unless one is unable to hear, one should not be reading along with a text from a missal. Rather, taking our cue from the General Instruction itself, we should listen as we would if Christ himself were standing at the ambo, for in fact it is God who speaks when the Scriptures are proclaimed. Carefully following along with the printed word can cause us to miss the gentle voice of the Holy Spirit, the message that the Spirit may have for us in one of the passages because we are anxious to "keep up," to move along with the reader.



Live

The Word of God calls for our listening and our response in silent reflection, as well as in word and song. Most important of all, the Word of God, which is living and active, calls each of us individually and all of us together for a response that moves beyond the liturgy itself and affects our daily lives, leading us to engage fully in the task of making Christ known to the world by all that we do and say.

Preparing for June

Catholics from every parish in the Diocese of Manchester are invited to gather for a time of prayer, fellowship, and formation in June of 2020. Together, we will deepen our understanding of the Church's liturgy so that we may be sent forth into the world, glorifying God with our lives.

For more information, visit www.MinistryEnrichmentGathering.org

Video Lesson

Fr. Jason Jalbert, Vicar General, Rector and Pastor of St. Joseph Cathedral, offers a quick take on the Liturgy of the Word.

To view, visit <http://bit.ly/themass-2>

Resources

- a. Archbishop Mark Coleridge, Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia: <http://bit.ly/36lyYDU>
- b. Roman Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida: <http://bit.ly/38LXFRl>
- c. Breaking in the Habit (Brother Casey): <http://bit.ly/2EpFZgQ>
- d. Busted Halo: <http://bit.ly/2Poxrx4>
- e. Article by Dr. James R. A. Merrick: <http://bit.ly/2PqNhrb>