

Discovering The Riches of The Mass
Session # 2: The Liturgy of the Word – DVD Notes

T1. Introduction to the Liturgy of the Word:

In the second session, we are going to focus on a main pillar of the Mass called The Liturgy of the Word. Two main pillars of at the center of the Mass, it is the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Those two main pillars are flanked by The Introductory Rites and at the end of Mass we have the Concluding Rites.

- A.** The Liturgy of the Word is a powerful moment in the Mass. God is coming now to speak with His people through the inspired words of Sacred Scripture. When we think about the Bible, we should remember that this is no ordinary book. This is not just a book filled with religious memories. This Book we as Christians believe is inspired by God; and the word inspired in Greek *theopneustos*, means literally, God-breathe – God breathe forth His divine words through human words to communicate to us.
1. The Bible certainly has a human dimension it was written by human beings, e.g. St. Paul. Human writers who wrote in a particular moment in history, with a particular audience in mind, so it is a very human work. But it is not just human, but it is also divine. God works through the human writer to communicate His words to us.
 2. That is why in the Catholic tradition the Scriptures are seen as being similar to Jesus Christ Himself – Jesus who was fully human and fully divine. The inspired Word of God also fully human and fully divine, just like the incarnate Word is fully human and fully divine.
- B.** So when we hear this words of Scripture we are hearing God speaking to us. Think about what that means. If you consider some of the moments in Salvation History where God speaks to His people.
1. One of the scenes in the OT would be Mount Sinai, where God came and gave them the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19 -20). Before He writes out the Ten Commandments on the tablets of stone, He speaks the words of the Ten Commandments to the people. The language used by God Thou Shall Not ... is a singular personal pronoun. God is not simply saying You All shall not do these things, - He is saying You should not do these things. It is as if He is speaking individually to each person the words of the Covenant.
 2. That is what happens when we hear the Word of God in the Liturgy. It is not some word being generically proclaimed, but God desires His Word to touch each individual person's hearts. Vatican II said, "In the Sacred Books, the Father who is in heaven, comes lovely to meet His children and talks with them. So God is coming to speak to us.
- C.** Think about what happens at Mass, when we have the Lector, someone from the congregation who proclaims the readings from Scripture. The person who is serving as the Lector is not simply doing a public reading of the Bible that is not what is happening in the Sacred Liturgy. The Lector is lending God, his or her voice at that moment. So that God's Word can be communicated through their human voice to the people. What a profound privilege it is to be a Lector – to stand up and read the Word of God.
1. For us as Catholics who go to Mass, we do not just walk in and have God's Word proclaimed. This is too sacred of a moment to rush right into it. That is why we have the Introductory Rites – we need to get ready. Israel, at Mount Sinai, they had to prepare for three days, consecrating themselves to the Lord before they heard the voice of the Lord.

2. So we have a small preparation at the beginning of every Mass, where we call on God's name in the Sign of the Cross, we confess our sins, we ask for God's mercy, we sing His praises and that's is all preparation for this moment when we hear His words in the Liturgy of the Word.
- D.** The Liturgy of the Word is the greatest Bible Study on earth. We have an exposure to so much of Scripture in the Liturgy of the Word.
1. There is a three-year cycle of readings that us used in the Catholic Sunday Masses. In Daily Mass, there is a two-year cycle of readings that exposes us to more breath of Scripture.
 - a) In the ancient Jewish culture, there was a three-year cycle of readings used in the Synagogues for their proclamation of the Word of God.
 - b) Most Catholics will encounter most of the Bible every three years, simply by attending Mass every Sunday.
 2. Difference kinds of levels of knowledge of Scripture:
 - a) "Verse knowledge" – You can quote Chapter and Verse. You know the verse and you can quote it and say where this passage is found in Scripture.
 - 1) Example: "John so loved the world that He gave His only Son, who ever believes in Him might have eternal life." John 3:16. Football verse – Hold up Sign.
 - 2) Protestants know that verse, Catholics might say somebody name John has a birthday on March 16. I wonder what that is all about?
 - 3) We can learn a lot from our dear protestant brothers and sisters who have a love for the Bible, we should imitate them and memorize Scripture.
 - b) Second level of knowledge of Scripture called "Passage Knowledge" – We may not know the actual Chapter and Verse, but we know the story, we know the passage.
 - 1) Examples: Story about some guy builds a big Ark..., we know it is about Noah, but we do not know where it is in the Bible. Jesus told story about a father who had two sons..., we know it is the Prodigal Son, but do not know where in Scripture it is located. (Luke 15) We know the story, but we do not know the actual Chapter and verse.
 - 2) We are exposed to so much of the Bible when we go to Mass. The Readings are not dependent on one individual person's preferences or their knowledge. So it is not dependent on what a particular Pastor would like to preach on, or where he feels he has a level of expertise.
 - 3) We are exposing ourselves to the whole breathe Sacred Scripture every time we attend the Liturgy of the Word.

T2.The First Reading:

Usually comes from the Old Testament, and in the Easter Season the readings are from Acts, which reflects an ancient Christian practice.

- A.** Passage is often chosen for its connection with the Gospel Readings. So it may be a reading that pre-figures something that happens in the ministry of Jesus; maybe it is a certain prophecy that is coming to fulfillment in the time of Jesus; or maybe there is a similar theme or a certain image that might connect with the Gospel Reading.

- B.** Why is the Old Testament Reading still part of our Liturgy? The OT has a very special place in the Liturgy of the Word. The whole of Scripture is sacred, it is all part of the great unfolding story.
1. While Jesus Christ in the New Testament is the climax of that story, we will really never understand the climax of the story, if we do not know the story that went before it.
 2. We should think about the Gospels in the NT as the last chapter in a great book. The last scene of a great movie. You cannot just open up great 1,000 page novel and turn to page 999 and think you are going to understand what it is all about. You cannot turn to the last scene of a great movie and appreciate it for all its worth if you do not know all the scenes that came before. Similarly if we just focused on the NT, but really did not know the OT we are really not going to understand Jesus and the Church He established unless we know the story that came before.
- C.** Lector says, The Word of the Lord, and people respond – Thanks be to God. When we hear The Word of the Lord, that is a joyful announcement. We just heard the Word of God through the words of men.
- This is amazing – one commentator on the Liturgy said, The Word of the Lord is like a trumpet call, a trumpet being blown, so this is a great announcement - The Word of the Lord and we respond with such enthusiastic grateful hearts and we say Thanks be to God.
 - That is the language of St. Paul in Romans 7:25 and 1 Cor 15:57, where Paul expresses tremendous gratitude for God's saving plan of Salvation accomplished in Jesus' Death and Resurrection. And since all of Scripture points ultimately to Christ and His work of redemption, it is fitting that we would echo Paul's word and say Thanks be to God, whenever we hear God's Word in the Liturgy.

T3.Responsorial Psalm:

- A.** One of the ways in which we respond to God's Word. We have just encountered God's Holy Word spoken to us in the First Reading and we respond to that word with God's own inspired words of Praise, Thanksgiving, and Petition.
1. Most of these Readings come from the Psalms, God's inspired words of Praise that we repeat back to Him. We have this prayer in a Liturgical dialogue, Antiphons – this back and forth movement. We see this back and forth movement throughout the Mass.
 2. For example:. Priest says, The Lord be with you, and we say, And with your spirit, he says, Lift up your hearts, we say, We lift them up to the Lord, he says, Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
- B.** This Liturgical dialogue has some roots in Scripture. We some indications of this in the Psalms, where the Psalmist is directing people to respond at certain moments.
1. Book of Revelation shows this Liturgical dialogue is a part of the Heavenly Liturgy – how the angels and saints praise God in Heaven. Rev 5:11-14
 "Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, "To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!" And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" and the elders fell down and worshiped."

2. This back and forth dialogue relates to our own human experience and expresses our own sentiment better than we can express it ourselves. That is what we see happening in heaven, and that Liturgical dialogue is what we enter into in the Mass.
3. That is why we have this back-and-forth, it is pointing to how we are participating to that Praise of God in Heaven.

T4. The Second Reading:

From the New Testament and is usually chosen independently from the other Readings. Usually coming from the Letters of Paul, the other Epistles, or the Book of Revelation. A lot of emphasis on exhortation – how to live out our life with Christ.

T5. The Gospel's special place in the Liturgy of the Word:

- A. Gospel given “extra ceremony” - We do a number of things differently at this moment that we did not do for the First Reading or for the Psalm or Second Reading:
 1. Standing – This standing reflects the posture of the Jews in the return from exile when the priest Ezra read the Book of the Law in Nehemiah 8:5. They stood in reverence for hearing that word. We imitate that and Stand for this particular Reading.
 2. We sing Alleluia throughout the year, except for Lent. We sing Alleluia – Praise Yahweh – words taken from the Psalms, Revelation 19.
 3. Great Procession with the Book of the Gospels, sometimes with candles and incense.
 4. Priest asks that the Lord “Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your holy Gospel.”
 - a) This was not said for the other Readings, except this language of cleansed lips recalls Isaiah 6:1-7 where the Prophet Isaiah had to have his lips purified by burning coals before he could proclaim God’s Word to Israel. And the priest before he can proclaim this particular sacred text asks God to cleanse his heart and lips that he may be worthy to proclaim the Gospel.
 - b) (Not on DVD) –When the Deacon who is to proclaim the Gospel, bows profoundly before the Priest, asks for the blessing, saying in a low voice: “Your blessing, Father.” The Priest says in a low voice: “May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips, that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.” The Deacon signs himself with the Sign of the Cross and replies: Amen.
 5. Deacon/Priest traces the Sign of the Cross, we do the same on our forehead, on our lips, and over our hearts. Asking that God’s Word may be on our Mind, on our Lips and on our Hearts. Then Deacon/Priest traces it over the Gospel
- B. Why all this extra ceremony? Because while all of Scripture is sacred and inspired, the proclamation of this particular Reading comes from the Gospels, which Vatican II said “Has a special place in the Bible because it is the principal source for the life of Jesus Christ.

T6. The Homily (“explanation”)

- A. Homily in Greek means explanation. We not only hear God’s Word, but we also get an explanation that also is following biblical practice. In the OT Nehemiah 8:7-8 there was a proclamation of the Law, but then the Levites helped the people to understand the Law. They met with them to give the people the sense, the meaning of the Law.
- B. Jesus did similar thing when He went from Synagogue to Synagogue Ministry. Typically, there would be a reading -e.g. Luke 4, He reads a scroll from the Prophet Isaiah and then He explains it. He says this has been fulfilled now in your midst.

- C. In the Church's Tradition, Vatican II, etc the Magisterial teaching has said a homily has a special role for catechizing the faithful.

T7. The Creed:

Here we stand up and say that we believe in one God. Reason for weekly affirmation of the Creed: Need to understand a key word at the beginning of the Creed – I believe.

A. According to the Catechism 150, belief has two aspects:

“Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God. At the same time, and inseparably, it is a free assent to the whole truth that God has revealed. As personal adherence to God and assent to his truth, Christian faith differs from our faith in any human person. It is right and just to entrust oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely what he says. It would be futile and false to place such faith in a creature.” CCC150

1. Intellectual assent – my mind assenting to all that God has revealed through the Scriptures and through His Church. My mind assents to all that has been revealed.
 2. Personal entrusting of oneself to God. One translation of belief in Hebrew (‘aman). Word from which we get word Amen! Cardinal Ratzinger talks about how that word (‘aman) means – to take my stand on someone else.
 - a) What is the foundation the support for my life – what am I really standing on? Am I standing on myself, my own plans, my own skills, my own dreams; or do I truly entrust my life on God.
 - b) Is God truly the foundation for my life. So when we recite the Creed week after week, we are not just intellectually reaffirming doctrines of the Church, we are entrusting ourselves ever more to God.
 3. The difference between the two aspects of belief, the Intellectual and the Entrusting: are like the difference between a Marriage and a Math Equation. In a Math Equation $2 + 2 = 4$. My mind can intellectually ascent to that – yes $2 + 2 = 4$. So I can say, I believe that $2 + 2 = 4$.
 - a) But when I look my wife in the eyes and say, honey I believe in you – I am not simply saying hey Beth, I believe that you exist. No, I am saying that I believe in you, I entrust myself to you, I entrust my heart, my life to you, I give myself to you.
 - b) When we go to Mass, we are saying to the Lord, that we want to give the Lord, our whole lives, we entrust everything to Him
- B. Story about man who walked the tightrope across Niagara Falls: He would walk across and people would cheer him and asked him to do it again. He said, do you believe, I can do it again – yes we believe in you, do it again. Do you believe I can cross blindfolded, Do you believe I can cross blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow, Do you believe that I can cross blindfolded, pushing a wheelbarrow, with somebody in the wheel borrow, and they said yes we believe in you. All right, who wants to get into the wheelbarrow? You see there is belief and then there is Belief!**
- C. True faith, true belief is ultimately about jumping in the wheelbarrow with God.**
1. There are so many aspects of our life that we want to control; we do not want to surrender to Him. There are areas of our lives maybe, that where we know that we really should not be doing this, we know that we should not be looking at this, we know we should not be saying this, but we do not want to change – we are holding back.
 2. There are areas of our lives that we are afraid to surrender completely to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, to our Almighty God.

3. The Creed challenges us every week to stand up before God and before all our brothers and sisters and say, Lord I believe, I am willing to jump into the wheelbarrow with you. Every week I am renewing my commitment saying, Lord I desire to give more of myself to you, I desire entrust more of my life to you – help me to do that.

D. Updated Translation of The Creed:

1. I believe vs. we believe: After Vatican II English was the only major western language that translated the word Credo with the plural “we”. Other countries said “I believe”. The “I believe” really reflects a more personal engagement of the faith, and it will unite us with the Catholics around the world, who are saying I believe, so it build greater unity. But it also challenges each individual to internalize their faith.

a) I am actually stepping forward and saying I believe. I am actually stepping forward and saying I Lord desire to jump into the wheelbarrow. I Lord desire to entrust more of my life to you.

b) Reminds us of what we do at a Baptism or at Easter we have the renewal of the baptismal promises. The Priest asks, Do you reject Satan. It is as if Jesus, through the Priest is staring at all of us – Do you believe in God – it is a personal question. Are you willing to live your life according to this Creed?

2. Consubstantial: We now say the Son was consubstantial with the Father. This really reflects a very important theological perspective from the Council of Nicaea (A.D. 325), which addressed a teaching by Aries, who taught that there was a time when the Son of God did not exist. He taught that the Son of God came from another substance not of the Father.

3. The Council of Nicaea wanted to protect the eternal divinity of the Son of God, and the Council taught that “the Son of God was God from God, light from light, true God from true God, consubstantial with the Father.” Consubstantial – of the same substance as the Father.

4. The Main Theological point being affirmed is that the Son was not a mere creature of the Father, not something created by the Father and brought into existence by the Father, but that the Son is eternally divine and with the Father

CCC 242 Following this apostolic tradition, the Church confessed at the first ecumenical council at Nicaea (325) that the Son is "consubstantial" with the Father, that is, one only God with him. The second ecumenical council, held at Constantinople in 381, kept this expression in its formulation of the Nicene Creed and confessed "the only-begotten Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, light from light, true God from true God, begotten not made, consubstantial with the Father".

T8. Prayer of the Faithful:

Where the Deacon, Lector, or Priest will bring petitions to God on behalf of all those gathered at the Mass. Petitions that are universal in scope when we pray for: The Church, Governmental Leaders, Poor. It is gathering all the petitions of the people after hearing God’s Word and presenting them to the Father before we go into the Liturgy of the Eucharist.