

The Liturgy of the Word (Part I)

The Liturgy of the Word is the first major part of the Mass. The action of the gathered assembly at this point in the liturgy is to **listen with reverence and attentiveness**. The Liturgy of the Word begins with the First Reading and concludes with the Prayer of the Faithful.

The power of the spoken word is at its greatest when that word is the Word of God. Spoken in community, the Word stands on its own dignity and is marked with a power that reaches into the hearts and souls of those gathered who have come to **listen and hear** what God is speaking to them both individually and as a community. When God said, "Let there be light!" and there was light - that was a powerful word! It is that all-powerful Word that we seek to encounter in the Liturgy of the Word. Christ's powerful words spoken to us at Mass are meant to change things, to change us, to change the hearts and the lives of all who hear them.

In the past, Catholics were accustomed to "reading the Mass" when the presider spoke Latin and we followed along in our missals. But now that the Mass is celebrated in English, we can safely put aside the missalettes and devote our attention to listening to the Word being proclaimed. "Reading along" and "listening attentively" are very different activities and often have very different results. When I have my own copy of the text in hand, I am no longer dependent on the proclamation of God's Word to the community. I am independent. I can read it faster or slower than the lector; I can read it backwards or forwards; I can read something else totally, if I choose! I alone am in control of the Word. But, if I am at

Mass for a spiritual encounter with the Living Word of God then I must surrender control to God. I must let God speak through the proclamation of the scriptures. If Christ were physically present in robe and sandals speaking to us at Mass, would any of us dare to follow along in a missalette? Certainly not! We are called to attentively listen to the Word of God and allow that Word to form, challenge, comfort and embrace us.

"When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel. Therefore, all must listen with reverence to the readings from God's word, for they make up an element of greatest importance in the Liturgy" (GIRM #29).

The way we Christians tell our story in liturgy owes much to the ritual storytelling of the Jewish communities at the time of Jesus. The scriptures of the Old Testament contain all types of literature - narratives, poetry, prophecy, laws, and more. These were proclaimed in the synagogue, listened to by devout Jews, including Jesus, and discussed among all for their meaning and implication for Jewish life. The scriptures of the New Testament contain primarily letters and narratives written to early Christian communities trying to remember the life and ministry of Jesus and live his teachings in their lives. All these scriptures together make up our rich story of faith.