

Understanding the Mass

Part 9 in a series

The Liturgy of the Word – God speaks to us through Scripture

“Jesus is present in his word, since it is he himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church.” These words from the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Second Vatican Council) help us understand that Jesus is truly speaking to us when we hear the sacred scriptures proclaimed in the Mass. Knowing this, we should listen attentively!

The Church has divided the Sunday readings into 3 cycles: A, B and C. The cycles begin each year with the start of Advent and continue throughout the liturgical year. We are currently in Cycle C (2019). The Gospel readings are taken from Matthew in year A, Mark in year B (supplemented by John) and Luke in year C.

On Sundays there are three readings and a responsorial psalm. The first reading is from the Old Testament. The exception to this is during the Easter season (Easter Sunday to Pentecost Sunday) when the first reading will be taken from the Acts of the Apostles. We read from Acts during the Easter season because it allows us get a good understanding of what it was like for the disciples of Jesus in the early Church. It speaks about how profoundly the disciple’s lives were changed by the Risen Lord.

The best way to get the most out of the scripture readings during Mass is to have taken a few minutes to read them beforehand. The Old Testament readings have been carefully selected so that they relate to the Gospel reading of the day! So, after we move out of the Easter Season where we read from the Acts of the Apostles for our first reading, challenge yourself to look for and find the relationship between the Old Testament reading and the Gospel each week. This will also help you see the connection that the priest or deacon makes in his homily to the scripture.

After the first reading the lector (reader) will exclaim, “The Word of the Lord”. This is a declaratory statement (stated with authority) that comes from scripture. (Homework! See 1 Peter 1:25). We respond with equal emphasis by also quoting from scripture, “Thanks be to God” (Homework! Paul’s writings: Romans 6:17; 2 Corinthians 9:15). We are truly thanking God for bringing His word to us.

Next is the Responsorial Psalm. There are 150 Psalms in the book of Psalms in the Bible. They are a collection of hymns, prayers and poems. The Psalms are used extensively in the daily prayer of the Church, *The Liturgy of the Hours*.

Why do we call this portion of the Liturgy of the Word the “Responsorial” Psalm? In general, because it responds to the first reading that we have just heard. It allows us to continue to focus on what God is telling us in the readings. Our response, which is sung, is a refrain that is taken from the Psalm and is often what points back to the first reading that we heard.