

# Understanding the Mass

## Part 11 in a series

### The Gospel reading

As we continue the Liturgy of the Word we now prepare to proclaim the Gospel, the words of Jesus Christ. This is done with formality and reverence as this is the Word of God as it relates to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Before the Gospel is proclaimed we all stand and sing the Alleluia, the Gospel Acclamation. This honors Christ who will “evangelize” the assembly. It contains a short Biblical sentence, praising Christ in his function of teacher and revealer or it recalls a Scriptural truth related to the theme of the readings.

If a deacon is present he will read the Gospel, however if no deacon is present the priest will proclaim the sacred text. Only an ordained minister (deacon, priest or bishop) can read the Gospel at Mass.

You may have noticed that the deacon will always step to the front of the priest, bow, and say something prior to the procession with the Book of Gospels. The deacon is asking the priest (or bishop) for his blessing prior to the reading. The priest acknowledges this request and says, *“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, amen.”*

As the deacon (or priest) moves to the altar to retrieve the Book of Gospels he is met there by two acolytes (altar servers) carrying candles. If incense is being used an acolyte carrying a Thurible (the vessel in which the incense is burned) will also join the procession. As the Alleluia continues to be sung, the Book of Gospels is held aloft and carried to the Ambo (the pulpit where the readings take place) preceded by the candles and incense. All of this is done with great solemnity out of respect for the importance of the Gospel.

After the Alleluia, the deacon will begin by greeting the congregation; asking the Lord to be with them. The congregation responds, using the same words used at the start of the Mass, “And with your spirit”. Then, the Gospel selection is announced and we respond, “Glory to you, O Lord” (again, we glorify God as we did at the beginning of the Mass!), while making the sign of the cross on our forehead, our lips and our heart. This signifies that we will open our minds to hear Christ’s words, plan to share his words with others by confessing them with our lips, and declare we believe Jesus with all our hearts. If incense is used, the deacon will then incense the Book of the Gospels. This is a way of showing that what is contained in the Book of Gospels is sacred.

After the completion of the reading the deacon will declare, “The Gospel of the Lord” and we respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ”. In this response we affirm that we have truly heard the voice of Jesus speaking directly to us. We praise him because of all He has done for us and because we have heard God’s word spoken to us. The deacon then kisses the Book of Gospels, again as a sign of reverence, closes the book, and steps away from the Ambo.