

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

INTRODUCTION

In the Readings, God speaks to His people with great love, opening up to them the mystery of redemption and salvation, and nourishing their spirit. Christ is Present in His Word when it is proclaimed at Mass. By their silent listening and pondering, by their singing and acclamations, the people make God's Word their own and affirm their acceptance of it in the Creed. The Biblical Readings and their accompanying Scripture chants may not be omitted, or replaced by non-biblical texts.

Those who read the Word of God at Mass should wait a moment for the people to sit down and compose themselves before they reverently approach the Lectern. Any sort of dashing to the lectern should be avoided. Rushed Liturgy is poor liturgy and this also applies to the Celebrant. This doesn't mean the celebrant drags the Mass or says it with a sort of long drawn out unctuous 'parsonic voice' out of character with his ordinary way of speaking.

After the Reader says: 'The Word of the Lord', there is a short pause before the Psalm is said or sung. If the Psalm is recited by the Reader, he/she should stay at the Lectern (Ambo) for this brief pause. But if the psalm is sung, the Reader can go back to their place immediately after the Reading. There should also be a short pause after the Second Reading before the 'Alleluia' is sung - musicians take note. There are several places in the Mass where silent reflection is called for. The Liturgy will be all the poorer if we ignore them.

It may sometimes be helpful for the Readings to be introduced by a brief word from the Celebrant in order to facilitate listening. However, it's inappropriate for lay people to make interjections during Mass, such as: 'The First Reading' or 'the response to the Psalm is' or 'please stand for the Gospel' or 'The Gospel Acclamation'. They hinder the prayer flow of the Mass and are unnecessary.

The Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. It is best sung - at least on Sundays. The psalms, which come from the Old Testament, were used by Christ Himself in prayer. Appropriate psalms have been selected to help the Assembly to meditate on, and respond to the Word of God in the First Reading.

The standard procedure is that the Cantor sings the prescribed Psalm from the Lectern (Ambo) and the whole Assembly comes in on the sung response. It

should not be altered or replaced by a Communal Hymn or other sort of Medley where the words, howsoever beautiful, are at variance from those in the Lectionary. It's best to refrain from tampering with God's Word. When sung unaccompanied, Psalms can often come across quite prayerful and uplifting. When accompanied, music wants to be sufficiently soft so that the congregation can hear every word of the Psalm without difficulty. A well sung Psalm really enhances the Liturgy of the Word.

This acclamation before the Gospel has traditionally accompanied the Gospel procession, in which the Book of the Gospels is carried to the Lectern (Ambo) accompanied by lighted torches and incense. This Acclamation Chant is sung by everyone present. The verse may be sung by the Cantor or Choir or even recited by the congregation.

The Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word. It is reserved for the Deacon or Priest. While bowing before the altar the Priest says a quiet prayer before he proceeds to read the Gospel. The Book of the Gospels may be incensed before the Reading. After the Gospel, as he kisses the book, the Priest says quietly the following words: "Through the words of the gospel may our sins be wiped away". To highlight its importance the Servers may stand with lighted torches at each side of the Lectern (Ambo) while the Gospel is proclaimed.

The celebrant or Deacon should refrain from holding aloft the Book of the Gospels when he says: 'The Gospel of the Lord'. The Gospel is in the proclamation - it's not the Book itself.

The Homily is an integral part of the Sacred Liturgy. It helps the assembly to understand the Word of God, assimilate it and apply it to their lives. On Sundays or holydays the homily may not be omitted without a serious reason and is not to be replaced by appeals or other forms of preaching, howsoever worthy. It is reserved to the Priest or Deacon and is not to be given by a lay person. Short appeals by lay people may be made at the end of Mass. It's most appropriate that a period of silence follows the Homily, so that the people may take the Word of God to heart. The Homily may be given either from the Lectern or from the Priest's Chair. Homilies given when the priest or deacon is moving up and down the aisle should be avoided. For a start, people to the back of the priest can't hear what he's saying and if the priest is moving back and forth it makes it difficult for the people to concentrate. It's also quite easy

to lose the main theme of the homily unless, of course, the preacher is another Billy Graham.

The Word of God first enters into my (mind) through my ears – 'faith comes through hearing' (Rom10:17.) It then must be allowed to 'drop from my head into my heart so that I make it my own and understand its implications and finally it reaches my hands so that I put it into practice in my daily life, remembering St James's words 'faith without good works is dead'. Remember the three H's - hearing, heart and hands.

The purpose of the Nicene Creed (formulated in the fifth century at the Council of Nicea) is that the whole Assembly may respond to the Word of God taken from the Readings and subsequently explained in the Homily. By reciting the Creed, the people also confess the great mysteries of the Faith soon to be celebrated in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. On more solemn occasions it can be sung but it is normally said. A profound bow is made by all at the phrase 'by the power of the Holy Spirit...and was made man'. At masses on Christmas Day and the Feast of the Annunciation all kneel at these words.

Having being nourished by the Word, the Faithful prays the 'bidding prayers' for the needs of the entire Church, for civil authorities, for those weighed down by various needs, for the local community and for the salvation of all.

These intentions should be short, clear and to the point so that the Faithful can understand and respond to them without difficulty. After the intention is announced there should be a very short pause before the Reader says 'Lord, hear us' which, along with the response, may be sung. If sung, it should be brief and not drawn out as, for instance, in the 'Taize' chant.