

A walk through the Mass

Part 2: Liturgy of the Word:

The Liturgy of the Word is when the Word of God is proclaimed (the readings), responded to (Responsorial psalm), explained (homily), accepted and held fast (the Profession of Faith), and appealed to (the General intercessions).

We have prepared ourselves for this encounter with God through the Introductory Rites and now we will be nourished by the Word of God in the Scriptures and then by His Body and Blood in the Eucharist. The Scriptures lead us to a deeper communion with Jesus. The Readings teach us about moral and spiritual living and tell us about God in God's own Word. Here, we encounter the word of God being spoken personally to each of us.

This part of the liturgy manifests the nature of the Church with a distribution of roles. All are called to listen to the Word. Lectors are delegated to proclaim the Word. The Lector is God's instrument; he/she is God's human voice. The priest or deacon's role is to expound on the Word, to teach with it. The Word we hear is not intended to remain within the liturgical assembly, but we are called by our Baptism and Confirmation to carry this Word with us into the world.

We **sit** for the readings and homily so that we can listen in comfort. But we **stand** for the Gospel and profession of Faith to show that we are ready to act on what we are hearing and proclaiming to believe.

Lectionary This is the liturgical book that holds the Scriptural readings used during the Liturgy of the Word. The Book of the Gospels, when used, is carried in by the Lector in the Entrance Procession. This Book contains the Gospels. It is used to show that the Gospels, being about the life of Christ, are extraordinary.

Sunday Readings: How the 4 readings are chosen. In setting up the Lectionary, it was decided to use cycles of readings to help the faithful become more familiar with the Bible. The Sunday readings are set up on a 3 year cycle so every fourth year we start to repeat the reading. This meant that more of the Scriptures were proclaimed at Mass. Another reason for establishing this method of cyclical readings is that naturally, each priest and congregation has particularly favorite parts of the Bible and as well as parts which they do not care for as much. Thus, the least favored parts would be avoided, and the favorites read more frequently. With the three year cycle, Catholics hear most of the Sacred Scriptures at the same time throughout the world and we are forced to confront the parts of God's Word that may make us uncomfortable.

For the **Gospels** Year "A" is Matthew, "B" is Mark and "C" is Luke. The Gospel of John is used in Lent and Easter and in year "B" with the Gospel of Mark, because the Gospel of Mark is the shortest of the 4 Gospels. The Gospel readings are a continuous or semi-continuous reading from Sunday to Sunday.

The **First reading** is from the Old Testament and was chosen to match the theme of the Gospel.

The **Second reading** is from the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles in Easter or from letters of St. Paul at other times. This reading is a continuous reading of the book or letter. Because it is a continuous reading, the theme of this reading may have very little to do with the theme of the Gospel.

The **Responsorial Psalm** which is usually from the Book of Psalms in the Old Testament reflects the same theme as the First Reading and Gospel.

Conclusion of the Readings:

Reader: "The Word of the Lord"

All respond, "Thanks be to God".

"The Word of the Lord": is a call to remind us of how marvelous it is for us to hear God speak to us through the Holy Scriptures.

"Thanks be to God": is an expression of thanksgiving and gratitude to God and is a common response in worship of God in the Bible (1 Chr 16:4; Col 2:7; 4:2). This phrase is used by St. Paul to thank God for delivering him from sin (Rom 7:25; 1 Cor 15:57). With this phrase, we thank God joyfully for Christ's victory on the Cross.

This is followed by a short period of silence for us to adore God who just spoke to us. It allows us time to reflect on what has been heard, much in the same way the Virgin Mary pondered in her heart the messages of the shepherds about her Son (Lk 2:18). Silence is used in the heavenly liturgy in Revelations (Rv 8:1).

Gospel:

Acclamation:

The acclamation is usually "Alleluia!" or "Praise the Lord" which are found at the beginning or end of many of the Psalms (Ps 104-106; 146-150) and are used by angels in heaven to praise God (Rv 19:1-9).

Introduction to Gospel

The priest says quietly, "Cleanse my heart and my lips, almighty God, that I may worthily proclaim your **holy** Gospel".

P: "The Lord be with you:

All respond: "**And with your spirit**"

P: "A reading from the holy gospel according to ____".

All: "Glory to you, **O** Lord".

And at the end of the Gospel

P: "This is the gospel of the Lord"

All: "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ"

The first silent prayer by the priest, "Cleanse ..." is to help him center his mind on the meaning of his actions. It recalls the prophet Isaiah's lips being purified before he proclaimed the word of the Lord (Is 6:1-9).

Holy: Stresses the importance of the Gospel that is being proclaimed.

"**And with your spirit**" follows the practice established in the Introductory Rites.

The word "**O**" has been added before the words "Lord" and "God" and is intended to show respect.

Homily

Having a homily is based on the customs in the Bible. The Levites explained the Law to the Jewish people (Neh 8:7). Jesus and the Apostles followed this custom. Jesus went into the Synagogue and read from the book of the prophet Isaiah (Lk 4:18-30); sat down and began to explain the passage that He had read. Jesus frequently taught in the synagogue (Mk1:21). Following this custom, the early Church had homilies at the celebrations of the Eucharist. The word "homily" means "explanation" in Greek. The Second Vatican Council stated that the Homily should be developed primarily from the Scriptural and liturgical sources to show God's wonderful action in the History of Salvation, especially as it relates to a specific local community. The Homily explains the Scriptures and applies them to our lives today.

Exegesis verse Isegesis. This means that the homily is to be about what Jesus is trying to

tell us in the Scripture and not what is the preacher trying to tell us. One of the reasons why, people studying to be priest have to spend so much time studying the bible is so that we can better understand what Jesus is trying to tell us. Some non-Catholic preachers bend what Jesus is saying and make it what the preacher wants to say. This is bad. In the Catholic Church, the preacher always tries to get at what Jesus was saying and meaning, and then applying that to our lives today.

Frequently when I give a Homily it will change slightly between Masses. This is because each community is slightly different and/or I think of a better way to express it.

The Creed:

The Creed is our profession of faith. This is when we profess what we believe. There are several versions that can be used: the Nicene Creed, the Apostles Creed with Children or the Baptismal form with questions.

I believe in one God, The Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, **of all things visible and invisible**. I believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the **Only Begotten** Son of God, **born of the Father before all ages**. God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, **consubstantial with the Father**. Through him all things were made. For us men and for our salvation he came down from heaven: **and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary**, and became man. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate; **he suffered death and was buried, and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures**. he ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. **I believe** in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son. **who** with the Father and the Son **is adored** and glorified. **who** has spoken through the Prophets. **I believe in** one holy catholic and apostolic Church. **I confess** one baptism for the forgiveness of sins **And I look forward to** the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

I am not going to try to explain the Creed completely. That is an entire course and lifetime study. To even briefly explain it is a many page effort. Here I just want to write about why we have and use the Creed and the changes you noticed in it when we started the new translation.

The Creed is a summary of the main articles of what we believe. That the teachings of the Church were to be put into some form is implicit in Mt 28, 19-20. If they were to teach all nations then they needed to formulate the essential doctrines. Therefore, the Creed is an authorized declaration of truths that are to be believed. When Christ said to Baptize in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is a statement of a creed. In Acts 8; 37 - the Baptism of the Eunuch shows that a profession of faith was required for Baptism. The Creed is not a new revelation, but simply states what we believe and helps prevent misunderstanding. The creed was used in Baptism (Acts 8:37). The Nicene Creed, which we usually use in Mass, was written by the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 AD was used and worked on in the Council of Constantinople in 381AD. It is referred to in the 451 Council of Chalcedon as the "Creed of the Council of Constantinople. While the Creed is not in the Holy Scriptures, it is part of the Liturgy of the Word because it summarizes the entire story continued in the Scriptures from Creation, to the Redemption by Christ, to the Sanctification by the Holy Spirit, to the time of the Church, to the second coming of Christ and finally to our entry into Heaven.

I believe: The Creed is the faith of the whole Church, but by using “I”, we are more in union with the entire Church. It is a statement that each of us personally believes and is a challenge to each of us to live the faith.

of all things visible and invisible: This choice of words is precise and encompassing. Some things may be visible but are unseen. Someone in another room is visible to anyone in that room, but unseen by those who are not in the room. So, God is the maker of all things that we can see and things that we cannot see for some reason and of things that are in fact invisible, like the angels. This draws on St. Paul who said God created all things, “in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible” (Col1:16).

Only Begotten: These are the same words that are in the Gloria. They reaffirm our faith that Jesus was intentionally begotten, that His presence has always been part of the God’s plan.

born of the Father before all ages: This is a precise statement of the preexistence of Jesus before creation. It draws on the beginning of the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1-2)

consubstantial with the Father: This word will be difficult for English users because it is unusual. In the 300’s, when the Church was struggling to define how Jesus and the Father related to each other, , a new word had was created to describe this unique relationship. The word is “*consubstantialis*” in Latin meaning “*of the same substance*” in Greek “*homoousios*”. Using this word preserves this unique word and gives us an opportunity to reflect more fully on the divine nature of Christ.

and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary: The use of the word “incarnate” makes it clearer that Jesus became human, took on flesh, when He was conceived, March 25, not when He was born, December 25. The Second Person of the Blessed Trinity was not just born of the Virgin Mary, but took on human flesh (Jn 1:14).

he suffered death and was buried: Jesus’ suffering implies His dying, but does not explicitly state it. Saying it this way is a better expression of what Jesus did – He really did die so He could rise.

and rose again on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures: This stresses that Jesus fulfilled all the Scriptures – the Old Testament prophecies and the New Testament proclamation of the Resurrection.

Who: This is changed from “He”. The Holy Spirit, being pure spirit and not human, is not male or female and is therefore better referred to in this manner.

with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified: Adored more closely resembles the Latin word and so is used throughout the New Translation in place of “worship”.

I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins: “Confess” is more forceful than just “acknowledge” and involves both the head and the heart. This also ties in with the Confiteor when we ask for the forgiveness of God.

And I look forward to the resurrection of the dead: This phrase expresses with confidence our belief of the resurrection and the joy that comes from that belief.

Prayers of the Faithful or General Intercessions.

In these prayers, we ask God for what is needed in the world and for the needs of individuals. The practice of praying for our needs goes back to the beginning of the Church. When St. Peter was imprisoned by King Herod, the Church prayed for his release. The angels came and released him (Acts 12:1-7). St. Paul told Timothy to intercede for all people with supplications, prayers and intercessions (1 Tm 2:1-4). St. Paul also prayed for the needs of his

communities and asked them to pray for him (1 Thess 1:2-3; 2 Cor 1:11). Jesus prayed for His disciples and for all of us who have come after them (Jn 17).

The petitions consider four areas: 1) the needs of the Church, 2) public authorities and the salvation of the world, 3) those burdened by any difficulties, and 4) needs of the local community.

This concludes the first half of the Mass: The Introductory Rite and the Liturgy of the Word. Next, we will look at the Liturgy of the Eucharist.