

# WHY DO WHAT WE DO AT MASS???

## LITURGY OF THE WORD

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### **Introduction**

The Liturgy of the Word is principally made up of readings from Sacred Scripture. In the readings, God's Word is spread before the assembly on an ambo. The ambo is the table where the Word is placed with reverence. This is no ordinary table. The homily, Profession of Faith, and Prayer of the Faithful (or Universal Prayer) develop and culminate this part of the Mass. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated with joy and contemplation. As such, the proclamation should not be done hastily. It is the inspired WORD! It is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence. At the Catholic Community of Pleasanton, let's chew and digest the WORD proclaimed in our midst. We need to take time to listen actively and be transformed by the Word of Life.

For our purposes at the Catholic Community of Pleasanton, the Liturgy of the Word can be divided into four sections – biblical readings and acclamations, homily, Profession of Faith, and the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful.

### **The Biblical Readings and Acclamations**

In the readings, God speaks to his people, opening up the mystery of redemption and salvation and offering spiritual nourishment. Christ himself is present in the midst of those gathered through his Word. In the responses to the proclaimed Word, silence and singing, we digest God's Word and make it our own. The first reading is offered at the ambo, which is reserved for the proclamation of Sacred Scripture. Typically, this reading is from the Old Testament except during Easter time when the record of the early Christians, the Acts of the Apostles, is proclaimed.

Following the first reading, the responsorial Psalm is also proclaimed from the ambo. Mirroring the practices of the Jewish synagogue, the gathered community replies to the Scripture with a psalm. The selection of the psalms in the lectionary follows general principles. The psalm might be chosen if the Scripture of the day quotes the same psalm, if a literary reference is made to the psalm, or if the psalm clearly illustrates the content of the Scripture. Accordingly, the psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word. The psalms reflect an array of sensibilities as we hear lament, contrition, thanksgiving, praise and petition.

The second reading comes from the letters of the New Testament, the Acts of the Apostles, or the Book of Revelation. In particular, the season of Ordinary Time is a continuous reading through the letters of the New Testament, week after week. There is no deliberate correspondence between the second reading and the other readings.

After the first and second readings, the acclamation, "The Word of the Lord," is said or chanted by the lector. The gathered people reply, "Thanks be to God," honoring the Word of God that they have received in faith and with grateful hearts.

The acclamation before the proclamation of the Gospel is the Catholic Community of Pleasanton's voice to welcome and greet the Lord who is about to speak in the Gospel. It is sung by all while standing. The Alleluia traces back to our Jewish roots and is best translated as praising God. Between the sung Gospel

acclamation is a scriptural verse taken from the lectionary, also called the Roman Gradual. This verse is sung by the cantor or choir. During Lent, the verse before the Gospel is sung in place of the Alleluia. For example and in some cases, the text "Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ, King of endless glory" is sung.

The proclamation of the Gospel is the high point of the Liturgy of the Word and set apart from the other readings with marks of honor:

- the minister appointed to proclaim it prepares himself by a blessing or prayer;
- the people stand as they listen to it being read and, through their response, acknowledge and confess Christ is present and speaking to them;
- marks of reverence (e.g. bowing to the book, kissing the book) are given to the Book of the Gospels; and
- the dialogue between the priest or deacon (when present) and the people gives a heightened solemnity to this moment.

### **The Homily**

The homily is part of the Liturgy of the Word and it is considered necessary for the nurturing of the Christian life. It should be about some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture. The homilist takes into account the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of our community so to apply the Scripture to the life and times of the assembly. The homilist is always a priest or deacon.

### **The Profession of Faith**

In the "Symbol of the Apostles," "Profession of Faith," or "Creed," we respond to the Word of God proclaimed in the readings taken from Sacred Scripture and explained in the homily. We call to mind and confess the great mysteries of faith by reciting the rule of faith handed on to us from the Apostles before these mysteries are celebrated in the Eucharist. The Creed is to be said or sung by all gathered on Sundays and Solemnities. It may also be used on important Feast days. During the seasons of Lent and Easter, the Apostles Creed may be used so that the assembly can join their voices with the baptismal symbol of the Church.

### **The Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful**

In the Prayer of the Faithful, the gathered assembly responds to the Word of God. Prayers are offered to God for the salvation of all. These are not prayers of Thanksgiving but petition. As a rule, the series of intentions are ordered as listed below:

- for the needs of the Church;
- for public authorities and the salvation of the whole world;
- for those burdened by any kind of difficulty; and
- for those counted among the communion of the dead.