

## LITURGY OF THE WORD – Don Pierini, April 24, 2005

St. John, in his Gospel, tells us, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God." Our community gathers in worship to be nourished by the Word of God and the body of Christ, through the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. These are the elements that form the heart of the Mass today.

The Liturgy of the Word consists of three readings:

The first is usually taken from the Hebrew Bible with the exception seen at this time of the Church year, the Easter Season, when passages from the Acts of the Apostles are read. The second is from the Letters of Paul and Peter, and the third from the four Gospels.

The readings are arranged in a Cycle of three years: A, B, and C.

Each year focuses on a particular Gospel:

We are presently in year A, the Gospel of St. Matthew.

Year B is predominantly St. Mark with a portion of St. John.

Year C is for St. Luke.

The scripture selections follow the liturgical seasons of Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter. The remainder of the Church year is considered Ordinary Time and the Gospel and letter readings are more or less in chronological order. The Liturgy of the Word concludes with a homily, the Profession of faith and the General Intercessions.

The word contained in the Hebrew Bible readings is proclaimed as a prophetic reminder of God's mighty deeds of salvation on our behalf. In the Gospels we learn about Jesus' identity and mission and are challenged to take this up as our way of living. The purpose of the homily is to open the Scripture readings for us.

The ***General Instruction of the Roman Missal*** makes it quite clear that the Liturgy of the Word is neither an appendage nor a preamble to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Together, they form one single act of worship. To ignore or somehow "miss" the Liturgy of the Word is to "miss" Mass. The importance of the Word within the Mass is stressed by carrying the Lectionary or the Book of the Gospels in the opening procession. Our starting point in the celebration of the Mass is the Word itself, especially the Gospels.

The Church spares no effort in trying to ensure that, when present at this mystery of faith, we Christian believers should not be there as silent spectators. On the contrary, we should take part in the sacred action, actively, fully aware and devoutly. Our listening, then, is not like listening to a lecture, not like listening to a play. It is listening with the whole self, mind and heart and soul.

We best prepare our selves to listen to the scriptures on Sunday by reading the scripture at home during the week. The upcoming passages are cited in the bulletin every Sunday.

We should give our full attention to the lector and presider and not rely on a missalette. The Word of God is meant to be communicated to us through proclamation and listening; if we follow along with our own text, we break the bond of communication.

And lastly, the readings are to be revered and honored. In my opening remarks, I quoted the Gospel of St. John. That quotation goes on to say that the "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus Christ is the incarnate word and dwells with us each and every opportunity we have to listen to the Word of the Lord. He is, in fact, present with us whenever His Word is proclaimed in our community as He is present in the Eucharistic Bread. It is for this reason that we respond, "Thanks be to God".