

REFLECTION 6

LITURGY of the WORD – Part II

Christ's presence slowly becomes more apparent to us throughout the Mass, and this is quite noticeable within the Liturgy of the Word right before the Gospel. We listened to the first and second readings and we sang the Responsorial Psalm while seated; now, the Gospel acclamation, the Alleluia is sung after the second reading and the congregation all stand.

Clearly, something significant is happening at this moment since we have all collectively changed our body postures from a receptive position to an active position. This is, in fact, a very significant moment of the Mass; we have reached the Gospel, the most important part of the Liturgy of the Word - the magnitude of this moment is explained by our singing of the Alleluia and the elevation of the book of the Gospels.

"Alleluia" is a Hebrew word which means "Praise the Lord God." By singing this acclamation while standing, we are acknowledging that God is becoming present to us in a new way. When the priest or the deacon elevates the Gospel and processes to the ambo (the podium where the readings are proclaimed), he is revealing to us where God is making his presence known - through the Word.

Before we hear the words of the Gospel, the book is signed with the cross, unifying Christ as the Word with the Christ of the Gospels. We then sign ourselves with the cross on our foreheads, our lips, and our hearts, petitioning Christ to open our minds, proclaim Him with our lips, and keep Him in our hearts through the Word.

The Gospel is the most solemn moment in the Liturgy of the Word because this part of the Mass builds up to the moment when Jesus Christ becomes literally present to us in the Word. This is not a recitation nor is it a

public reading; through the Gospel proclaimed by the priest or the deacon, Jesus Christ is present as the Word, the same Word that created the heavens and the earth and the same Word that is mentioned at the beginning of the Gospel of John. Our last words, "Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ," emphasize that it is actually Christ who has revealed himself to us and is present among us.

We began these reflections focusing on the words of Saint Augustine, who described God and His Church as "beauty ever ancient, ever new." The Liturgy of the Word proves this. It unites the faithful of the past with the faithful of the present.

The Mass we participate in today is essentially the same Mass of the first Christians. However, we may take something out of the readings based on the current situations of the modern age. This is the role of a priest or a deacon during the homily, also called the sermon: to apply the Word to our lives today. This should also prepare us and instruct us for when we go forth from the Mass after the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

After the homily, we stand again to recite the Creed. The Creed was crafted in the earliest days of the Christian faith. It contains within it the most fundamental beliefs that Christians must hold and professing it together as a community prepares our hearts for the Mystery that is to come in the Eucharist. Because the Eucharist is the most profound expression of our Faith, we can think of the Creed as a key that allows us to gain access to the next part of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

During the Creed, we bow deeply (and on some days kneel) during the moment when the incarnation is mentioned by the words: "And by the Holy Spirit... became Man." Because we are about to witness the bread and wine turn into the body and blood of Christ, we must be intentionally focused on the idea of God becoming man to be more physically present to us. This is, after all, the entire reason for the Mass.