

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Mass consists of two main parts, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist (along with opening and closing rites). We often think of the two halves as being separate, almost as if they have nothing to do with each other. But in reality, the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist are so closely connected that they form one single act of worship. In the Mass, we celebrate at two tables, the ambo (or pulpit) and the altar. At these two tables, we encounter and are fed by Jesus as both the Word of God and the Bread of Life.

The Liturgy of the Word is the part of the Mass when we encounter God through the proclamation of Scripture and then respond in faith. It begins with the First Reading, followed by the Responsorial Psalm and the Second Reading. On the greater feasts and solemnities, a sequence is sung immediately after the Second Reading. Generally speaking, though, the Gospel Acclamation and the Gospel Reading follow. The homily comes at the end of the readings, and allows the opportunity for the presiding priest to guide the assembly in applying the Good News of the Scriptures to daily life. The Liturgy of the Word concludes with the Proclamation of Faith (also called the Creed) and the Prayers of the Faithful. Throughout the Liturgy of the Word, we alternate between moments of receiving the Word (primarily the readings and the homily), and responding to the Word as members of the assembly (the response to the Psalm, the Gospel Acclamation, the Creed, and the Prayers of the Faithful) and as individuals (moments of silence for contemplation throughout the liturgy).

In a society which values literacy and the written word so highly, it is easy to think that the 'Word' we encounter is actually the lectionary, the physical object from which the scripture is read. But the Word of God that we encounter in the Mass is the actual proclamation, in the sense that God is speaking directly to us through the voice of the lector or presider. The entire Liturgy of the Word is really like a conversation we are having with God, one which deepens our relationship with Him and strengthens our faith.