

## Homily for the 18<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

OK. Last week I mentioned that for 5 weeks straight, our Gospel reading will come from the sixth chapter of John, often referred to as the “Bread of Life Discourse”, because Jesus speaks all about the “bread from heaven”. I shared that I would like to offer a series of homilies all about the Mass – what we do and why we do it. Last week, we began with the Introductory Rites of the Mass. And by the way, last week’s homily and all my Sunday homilies are available on our parish website. Today we’ll continue with the Liturgy of the Word.

In this week’s Gospel, we see the people chasing after Jesus because He just performed the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, as we heard about last week. Now, they definitely know that there’s something special about Jesus. But, when they ask Jesus to perform just one more sign, He tells them what they must do is not keep asking for signs, but “believe in the one whom God sent” – namely, Jesus. But, as St. Jerome declared back in the 300s, “Whoever is ignorant of the Scriptures is ignorant of Christ.” So, if we want to heed Jesus’ command of believing in Him, we cannot be ignorant of the Scriptures.

Why is this? Because Jesus Himself is the Word of God. At the beginning of creation God spoke and things came into being – “Let there be light”, and there was light. The Word the Father spoke in creation was the Eternal Word, and is another name for the Son of God. Ever hear of the Eternal Word Television Network – EWTN? But in time – roughly 2,000 years ago – that Eternal Word took flesh, and was born of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Given the name Jesus, which literally means, “God saves”, His whole mission was to reveal to us who the Father is – the Word of God speaks to us with words of who God is. The Bible, or Sacred Scripture, is the written words that people wrote down, but were totally inspired by God so that we could know what God wants us to know for salvation. Therefore, Jesus is the definitive Word of God, who through the Bible, speaks to us of who God is.

The Liturgy of the Word is all about the Scripture readings. It’s the first major part of the Mass – the other being the Liturgy of the Eucharist, which we’ll cover in a couple weeks. You may already know that the Bible readings read at Mass are all contained in one handy book, called the Lectionary. You probably have also noticed that a special book is used for the Gospel, which is carried by the lector in the entrance procession. This is called the ‘Book of the Gospels’, and it helps us give special reverence and attention to the Gospels, which is very Good News of Jesus Christ as recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

What you may not know, however, is that the Sunday Lectionary is broken down into a three-year cycle based on the Gospel. Year A, focuses on Matthew; Year B, which we're in now, focuses on Mark, and Year C on Luke. The Gospel of John is read during the Lent and Easter seasons, and is sprinkled in at other times of the year too. The Old Testament readings were chosen to complement the theme of the Gospel each week. The New Testament readings, most often from St. Paul's Letters are read continuously. For example, the Letter to the Romans is read each week until completed, then another follows. This arrangement of readings actually allows us to hear over 40% of the New Testament during Sunday Mass and 4% of the Old Testament. The arrangement of the Lectionary is so appealing that many mainline Protestant churches use the same order of readings each Sunday. And, if we were to add Scripture readings read at weekday Masses to those on Sundays, then we would cover nearly 14% of the Old Testament and nearly 72% of the New Testament. Hmm, maybe you'd like to come to weekday Mass to be less and less ignorant of Christ!

Now, about the actual Scripture readings:

1. The first reading is usually from the Old Testament. As Christians we believe that everything that happened among the Jewish people were events and teachings leading up to the fullness of God's revelation in Jesus Christ. The Old Testament is also a foreshadowing of what's to come in the New Testament.
2. Next, we sing the Responsorial Psalm, this is, our sung response to one of the 150 psalms in the Bible. We sing the psalms because that's how they were composed by the Israelites. They beautifully express just about every human emotion in our relationship with God.

3. The second reading then comes from the New Testament. These speak to us about how the early Church responded to Jesus' teachings, how they lived and practiced their beliefs.
4. Finally comes the Gospel, which we stand for. These are Christ's own words. They demand our respect and attention. To prepare for the Gospel, we sing the Alleluia, which literally means "Praise the Lord". The priest introduces the Gospel reading by making a small cross with his thumb, first on the words of the gospel reading, then a cross on his forehead, lips and heart. Then, everyone does the same, as we all silently pray together, "Lord, be in my mind, on my lips, and in my heart."

Following the Gospel, the priest or deacon gives the homily, which is sometimes called the sermon. The word "homily" comes from the Greek word meaning "conversation", and is meant to break open the Word of God just proclaimed. As someone once remarked, "the only sources you need to preach on Sunday is the Bible and the newspaper." That's actually pretty true. And so homily preparation involves much more than just research into the Bible, but includes applying that text to the events in the world today – to make it relevant to our lives. I always try to do this.

After the best homilies you've ever heard (wink, wink), comes the Profession of Faith, which is also called the Creed, and begins: "I believe in one God, the Father almighty..." The technical name of this creed is the Nicene Creed, since it originated from the Council of Nicaea – a city in ancient Turkey. The Council of Nicaea was held in the year 325 AD, when all the Bishops of the Church first gathered to settle disputes within the Church that had to do with basic elements of our faith. The result of the council was this creed – a list of the essential beliefs of Christianity, which is also used in many Protestant churches too.

The Liturgy of the Word then comes to a conclusion with the Prayer of the Faithful, also known as the General Intercessions. These petitions gather together all the prayers of the assembly. In the Prayer of the Faithful we pray for needs that are above and beyond our own individual petitions. This is why we all respond together at the end of each one of these petitions: “Lord, hear OUR prayer.” In general, there must always be these four intentions: for the Church; for world leaders; for this community and our needs; and for the sick and suffering.

We also pray for the “intention of the Mass” when the petition is read: “For *so and so*, who we pray for in a special way at this Mass today.” You may not know this, but Mass can be offered either for the special intention of a living person, or for someone who is deceased, who may be undergoing their purification in purgatory. This is what this petition is all about – someone has requested that a loved one, living or deceased, be remembered at Mass so that the many graces of the Mass might be applied to them – to either aid their entrance into heaven from purgatory, or to aid them in their trials and struggles here on earth. Offering Mass for the intention of another is a good and holy practice. Want to offer a special gift? Want to offer consolation to someone? Have a Mass offered for them! Anita takes care of this in the parish office.

Well, that concludes the Liturgy of the Word, so we’ll stop there for today. But we’ll resume with the Liturgy of the Eucharist when we continue. God bless you.