



Pastor's Column

St. Peter Catholic Church

December 16, 2018, Third Sunday of Advent (Gaudete Sunday)

The Mass Explained - Liturgy of the Word and the Homily

We continue our Pastor Column series on the Mass explained, and we turn now to the Liturgy of the Word and the Homily.

Following the Collect (which concludes the Introductory Rites), the congregation now sits, just as the vast multitudes of disciples and other people sat at the feet of the Lord whenever He was in their midst to teach them, console them, and enlighten them with His words, prayers, and humble presence.

The First Reading. Outside of the Easter season, this Scripture text is usually taken from the Old Testament (during the Easter Season, it is taken from the Acts of the Apostles). These texts of the Old Testament selected for Mass feature themes of the Old Testament covenants (which are all foreshadow of the "new and eternal covenant" of the Blood of the Lamb), or these texts feature an Old Testament prophecy that is fulfilled in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is hidden in the Old, and the Old is fulfilled in the New.

Following the First Reading is the Responsorial. This usual comes from the Psalms, though it may come from any of the canticle-style texts of the Old Testament (and sometimes even of the New Testament, such as the *Benedictus* or the *Magnificat* in the first chapters of the Gospel narrative of Saint Luke). The Responsorial is usually sung rather than said; as Saint Augustine so famously teaches, we who sing well pray twice. The theme of the Responsorial reflects and expounds upon the theme of the First Reading.

The Second Reading. This always comes from the New Testament. Often it may also touch on the theme of the First Reading, or just as often may have its own stand-alone theme to touch on other aspects of our Christian faith.

After both First and Second Readings, we respond "Thanks be to God" in gratitude for the holy teaching that is given to us in Sacred Scripture.

The Gospel acclamation ("Alleluia" outside of the Season of Lent; or "Praise to You, Lord Jesus Christ..." during Lent). The congregation now stands to acknowledge the very words of the Lord Himself which are about to be proclaimed; or even if the words that were spoken by Christ Himself are contained in the Gospel text for that Mass, the Gospel nonetheless pertains directly to the supreme mystery of the Christ event. The Gospel verse sung in this acclamation serves as sort of a preamble to the prominent theme of the Gospel text that is about to be proclaimed, and the verse often comes directly from that Gospel text itself.

The Gospel. When the deacon goes to receive a blessing from the celebrant, he says, "Your blessing, Father." The celebrant then prays: "May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may worthily proclaim His holy Gospel, in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Or if the priest himself proclaims the Gospel, he bows to the altar and prays similarly.

The Gospel is always proclaimed by the deacon; in the absence of a deacon, the Gospel is always proclaimed by a concelebrating priest (if any), or else by the celebrant himself. The Gospel proclamation is reserved for the ordained clergy, who receive the authority and the responsibility of proclaiming the Gospel with Holy Orders. And as at the start of the Mass, we exchange the holy dialogue ("The Lord be with you." "And with your spirit.") as if we were beginning again, or rather beginning anew – drawing ever closer to the Lord (in this instance, through His Gospel). We trace the Sign of the Cross on the forehead, the lips, and the chest that we may know the Word of God, speak the Word of God, and love the Word of God.

After the Gospel is proclaimed, the deacon or priest kisses the Book of the Gospels. Or if a bishop is presiding, the deacon (or priest) takes the Book of the Gospels to him that he may kiss it, and only after the

Book of the Gospels is revered with this holy kiss do we all sit for the homily.

When the deacon (or priest, or bishop) kisses the Book of the Gospels, he prays, "Through the words of the Gospel, may our sins be wiped away."

The homily. The homily has three functions: to console, to edify, and to exhort (though a homily might emphasize one or two in particular for a variety of pastoral reasons). It must be made very clear that the homily is not primarily to entertain. Even though people might complain about boring homilies, we cannot be confused about this point: homilies are not intended to entertain us but in fact are meant primarily to console, to edify, and to exhort.

A homily expounds upon the themes of the Scripture texts for that Mass. But the homily might also speak to the occasion (for example: weddings; funerals; ordinations); the homily might speak to the liturgical season; or the homily might speak to the liturgy itself, using the Mass prayers as its primary basis (for example: the Gloria; the Creed; the Eucharistic Prayer).

~ Fr. Lewis