

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

The Mass, Part 8 – Thy Word is a Lamp unto My Feet

This week, we continue our discussion of the Mass as a banquet. Last week, we talked about the “greeting,” or Introductory Rites. This week, we move on to the “getting to know you” section of the Mass banquet. This section of the Mass is known as the Liturgy of the Word, for it is through His Word that we get to know the Lord best.

The Liturgy of the Word is one of the two core parts of the Mass, along with the Liturgy of the Eucharist. The Liturgy of the Word generally includes the following elements: a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures (the Old Testament), a Psalm response (which is often sung), a reading from the Epistles (or letters) in the New Testament, a reading from one of the four Gospels, the Homily, the Profession of Faith and the Universal Prayer (the Prayer of the Faithful). Obviously, the main elements of this Liturgy are the readings from Scripture. *The General Instructions of the Roman Missal (GIRM)* remind us, “When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his word, proclaims the Gospel.” [GIRM, 29]

Our Sunday readings are organized in such a way that they follow a three-year cycle. Year A focuses on Matthew’s Gospel, Year B (our current year) is mostly from Mark, with some supplementation from John. Year C is centered on Luke’s Gospel. The first reading from the Hebrew Scripture complements the Gospel. The Psalm is a response to the first reading. During special seasons of the year, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent and Easter, the second reading also complements the other two readings. In ordinary time, we have a continuous

reading of certain Epistles instead. (For example, we have been reading from the Letter to the Hebrews over the last few weeks.) [N.B There are some exceptions to this general structure, such as having only one reading on weekdays.]

Following the readings, the priest or deacon will give a homily. According to the *GIRM*, the homily “should be an explanation of some aspect of the readings from Sacred Scripture [...] and should take into account both the mystery being celebrated and the particular needs of the listeners.” [GIRM, 65] The difference between a homily and a sermon is that a homily has a specific focus on the readings of the day, whereas a sermon can be based on whatever topic the preacher decides. The homily should be not only a reflection on the readings, but also give the listeners a better understanding of an aspect of our faith and how to apply it in our daily lives.

Following the homily, we stand and profess our faith. Our Profession of Faith, or Creed, reminds us of the core of our faith. In it, we “honor and confess the great mysteries of the faith...” [GIRM, 67] We conclude the Liturgy of the Word by offering God our prayers in the Universal Prayer. “In the Universal Prayer or Prayer of the Faithful, the people respond in some sense to the Word of God which they have received in faith and, exercising the office of their baptismal Priesthood, offer prayers to God for the salvation of all.” [GIRM, 69] We offer prayers for ourselves, our Church, and our world.

Since we have mentioned Church seasons above, we will further elaborate on that discussion next week.

