



### SESSION THREE

## The Liturgy of the Word

#### Elements of the Liturgy of the Word

- First Reading
- Responsorial Psalm
- Second Reading
- Gospel
- Homily
- Profession of Faith
- Prayer of the Faithful

#### Establish the Context

In the Introductory Rites of the Mass, we prepared ourselves seriously for the profound encounter we would have with the Lord in the Liturgy. We were about to hear his inspired Word spoken to us through the Scriptures and then receive Jesus himself in Holy Communion. To prepare for these sacred mysteries, we

first consecrated ourselves to him in the Sign of the Cross, performing a ritual reminiscent of the placing of a cross-like mark on God's faithful people in the book of Ezekiel. Next, the priest reminded us of God's presence with us as we embarked on this sacred journey through the Liturgy. He addressed us with the words "The Lord be with you," echoing what God and his angels said to Moses, Joshua, Mary, and others when they were called to important missions. Humbly recognizing our unworthiness to approach God in the Mass, we confessed our sins in the *Confiteor* and called out for his mercy in the *Kyrie*. Finally, we praised God in the *Gloria*, a prayer that sums up Christ's work of salvation. Now we turn our attention to the Liturgy of the Word, where we encounter God speaking to us through the proclamation of the Sacred Scriptures.

## Read

Read the prayers for the second main section of the Mass, known as the Liturgy of the Word. This will take you through the various Scripture readings to the Creed and the Prayer of the Faithful.

Read Chapters 7 through 13, "The Liturgy of the Word," in the *Biblical Walk Through the Mass* book.

## Take a Deeper Look

Answering the following questions will help you understand the scriptural roots of the Liturgy of the Word. If you do not understand something, make a note to bring it up in your small group discussion.

### *The Readings from Scripture*

1. Paul teaches that all Scripture is inspired by God (see 2 Timothy 3:16). The word in Greek for "inspiration" (*theopneustos*) means "God-breathed." The Bible is God's divine Word communicated to us in the words of men.
  - a. Read CCC 105. Who is the common author of all the varied books of the Bible?
  - b. Read CCC 106. What is the relationship between the human writers of Scripture and God, the divine author?
  - c. Read the following passages. What does the Bible teach about the power of God's Word?
 

Isaiah 55:10-11

Hebrews 4:12

2 Timothy 3:14-17

## ***The First Reading***

The First Reading is generally from the Old Testament, with texts typically chosen for their connection with the Gospel reading. Following ancient custom, the First Reading during Easter Season is taken from the Acts of the Apostles, which highlights how the Church bore witness to the death and resurrection of Christ.

2. Read CCC 121–123 and CCC 129.
  - a. Why is the Old Testament still important today?
  - b. How should Christians read the Old Testament and understand its relationship to the New Testament?

## ***The Responsorial Psalm***

During the Responsorial Psalm, we praise, thank, or call out to God as the lector and the people recite lines from Scripture in alternating fashion. This practice has roots in the Bible.

3. The back-and-forth movement of the Responsorial Psalm can be found in different places in both the Bible and the Mass.
  - a. Read the following passages and notice how they reflect the antiphonal pattern of the Responsorial Psalm:  
  
 Psalm 124:1  
  
 Revelation 5:11-14
  - b. **Think About It:** In addition to the Responsorial Psalm, what are some other places in the Mass where this kind of liturgical dialogue—this back and forth of praise or thanksgiving—is found?

## ***The Second Reading and the Gospel***

The Second Reading, which comes from the New Testament, is used on Sundays and solemnities. It is usually chosen independently of the First Reading and the Gospel, but it sometimes corresponds to the themes of a particular season, such as Christmas or Lent.

4. After the Second Reading, the Liturgy of the Word reaches a climactic moment in the Proclamation of the Gospel.
  - a. Drawing on your own recollection of this moment of Mass, what happens at the Proclamation of the Gospel that does not happen with the other readings from the Bible? In other words, what unique rituals and prayers occur specifically before the reading of the Gospel?
  - b. Why do you think the Gospel receives this extra attention in the Mass? (See CCC 125.)

### ***The Homily***

The word *homily* means “explanation” in Greek. It is used to describe the priest’s (or bishop’s or deacon’s) explanation of and expounding upon the biblical texts proclaimed in the Liturgy of the Word. This practice has its roots not only in the early Church but also in the Scriptures themselves.

5. Read Nehemiah 8:5-8. In this passage, the book of the Law is not merely proclaimed to the people. What do the Levites do to ensure that the Word of God is understood properly?
6. In Jesus’ day, the Scriptures were read in the synagogue and then explained by the rabbis or other leaders. How is this reflected in the following verses, which report Jesus’ own ministry in the synagogues?

Mark 1:21

Luke 4:18-30

### ***Profession of Faith: The Creed***

After the homily, we stand and recite the Creed.

7. The ancient Israelites had their own creed-like summary statement of faith, found in Deuteronomy 6:4-5. It is known as the *Shema*, a Hebrew word meaning “hear,” which is the first word of the statement: “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD ...” In reciting the *Shema*, the Israelites expressed a different view of the world than was commonly accepted. The nations around Israel believed in multiple deities; they worshipped not the Creator but the things he created, such as the sun, moon, stars, rivers, and animals. Israel’s *Shema*, however, emphasized

belief in only one God (monotheism). Israel's God was the one true God over all and the Creator of all the things that the pagans mistakenly viewed as deities. In this, the *Shema* was countercultural.

### **The Nicene Creed**

I believe in one God,  
the Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible and invisible.  
I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ,  
the Only Begotten Son of God,  
born of the Father before all ages.  
God from God, Light from Light,  
true God from true God,  
begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father;  
through him all things were made.  
For us men and for our salvation  
he came down from heaven,  
and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate  
of the Virgin Mary  
and became man.  
For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate,  
he suffered death and was buried,  
and rose again on the third day  
in accordance with the Scriptures.  
He ascended into heaven  
and is seated at the right hand of the Father.  
He will come again in glory  
to judge the living and the dead  
and his kingdom will have no end.  
I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life,  
who proceeds from the Father and the Son,  
who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified,  
who has spoken through the prophets.  
I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.  
I confess one baptism for the forgiveness of sins  
and I look forward to the resurrection of the dead  
and the life of the world to come. Amen.

- a. In what ways is the Christian view of the world (as summarized in the Creed) different from the way many modern men and women view the world and live their lives? For some ideas, review pages 91–92 in the book *A Biblical Walk Through the Mass*.
- b. Read Deuteronomy 6:4-5. In what way is the Christian Creed similar to this Old Testament creedal statement? In what ways is it different?
- c. Read Deuteronomy 6:6-9. List the things the Israelites are instructed to do with the *Shema*.
- d. How might the ancient Israelite devotion to the *Shema* (as seen in Deuteronomy 6:6-9) inspire us to say and ponder the Creed?

### ***Prayer of the Faithful***

In the concluding part of the Liturgy of the Word, we respond by presenting our petitions to God through the Prayer of the Faithful. Here we intercede for the Church, for those in authority, for those in need, and for the salvation of all people.

- 8. Read the following passages. What do they tell us about intercessory prayer?

Acts 12:1-7

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

2 Corinthians 1:11

- 9. For Personal Reflection:** In the Prayer of the Faithful, the people are often invited to pray for their own intentions in the silence of their hearts. What intentions would you like to pray for when you next attend Mass?

## Application

*This exercise will help you apply one of the key themes of the session to your life. After meditating on it, respond to God with a brief written prayer if you choose.*

The people of Israel prepared themselves for three days before encountering God’s Word spoken to them at Mount Sinai. One thing we can do to prepare ourselves better to hear God’s Word at Mass is to read the Sunday Mass readings before we go to church. The daily readings are available online at the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops website, at [bible.usccb.org/daily-bible-reading](http://bible.usccb.org/daily-bible-reading).

This week, read the Mass readings for the upcoming Sunday Mass. Before you begin, say a prayer asking God to help you be attentive to what he wants to teach you through these readings. Then think about one thing that stands out to you in the readings—something which either grabs your attention, piques your interest, or is related to something in your life now ... something through which you sense God might be speaking to you.

*Dear Lord ...*



## SESSION THREE TALK NOTES

# The Liturgy of the Word

### I. Introduction to the Liturgy of the Word

- A. The Bible: fully human, fully divine  
Greek, *theopneustos*, “God-breathed”
- B. God speaks to us in Scripture
  - 1. Mount Sinai, Ten Commandments: an individual message
  - 2. “In the sacred books, the Father who is in heaven meets his children with great love and speaks with them” (*Dei Verbum*, 21).
- C. Role of the lector: lending God a voice
- D. The Liturgy of the Word: “the greatest Bible study on earth”
  - 1. Cycle of readings
  - 2. “Verse knowledge” versus “passage knowledge”

### II. The First Reading

- A. Connection with the Gospel
- B. The place of the Old Testament in the Liturgy of the Word
  - 1. “The Word of the Lord”—a joyful announcement
  - 2. “Thanks be to God”—our grateful response  
Echoes Paul’s language—e.g., Romans 7:25; 1 Corinthians 15:57

### III. Responsorial Psalm

- A. We respond with his inspired words
- B. Liturgical dialogue: roots in Scripture
  - 1. Psalms
  - 2. Revelation 5

### IV. The Second Reading—New Testament: Emphasis on Living the Life of Christ



## **V. The Gospel's Special Place in the Liturgy of the Word**

- A.** The Gospel is given “extra ceremony”
  - 1.** Standing (see Nehemiah 8:5)
  - 2.** Singing and praise (“Alleluia”—Psalms, Revelation 19)
  - 3.** Procession
  - 4.** Priest asks God to cleanse his heart and lips: Isaiah 6:1-7
  - 5.** The Sign of the Cross

## **VI. The Homily (“Explanation”)**

- A.** Nehemiah 8:7-8: Old Testament precedent
- B.** Luke 4: Jesus’ example
- C.** Magisterium: special role of the homily in catechesis

## **VII. The Creed**

- A.** Reason for weekly affirmation
- B.** Meaning of “believe” (see CCC 150)
  - 1.** Intellectual assent
  - 2.** Entrusting self to God
  - 3.** Hebrew root (*'aman*)
- C.** The Creed challenges us to entrust our entire lives to God
- D.** Some key words in the Creed:
  - 1.** “I believe” versus “we believe”
  - 2.** “Consubstantial”—reflects Council of Nicaea (AD 325) addressing Arianism

## **VIII. Prayer of the Faithful**

A BIBLICAL WALK THROUGH  
THE MASS