

FROM THE PASTOR

My dear brothers and sisters,

As we continue our survey of the Mass, we move into the Liturgy of the Word. This is the first of the two major sections of the Mass (the other being the Liturgy of the Eucharist).

So often, we don't know how to read the Sacred Scriptures, the Bible. For many, we read it as if it were literature. True, the Bible has been written with many literary genres, but the Bible isn't just literature – it is the Word of God. And it is not simply a retelling of what God said millennia ago, but God speaking to us today. God has a unique word of love for YOU today! Each day, God longs to speak with us because we are His beloved children. When we read the Bible, God speaks to us. Henri de Lubac, a great theologian of the last century, put it this way:

Scripture is not only divinely guaranteed, it is divinely true. The Spirit did not only dictate it; he is, as it were, contained in it. He inhabits it. His breath perpetually animates it. The Scripture is 'made fruitful by a miracle of the Holy Spirit.' It is 'full of the Spirit.'

We need to listen with attentive hearts to what God is saying to us – to me – each time we come to Mass. This is why in earlier articles I emphasized reading the Sunday readings before Mass – so that our ears and our hearts would be open to what God is saying to each of us.

Okay, so we now have a sense of what the Sacred Scriptures are, how are they used at Mass? At each Sunday Mass we have two readings, a Psalm, an Alleluia and verse, and then a reading from the Gospel. The first reading most often is from the Old Testament – the part of the Bible that goes through the creation of the world and the creation of God's people: Israel. Sometimes, however, the first reading can be taken from the Acts of the Apostles or the book of Revelation (both in the New Testament). The first reading is always somehow connected with the Gospel of the day.

After the first reading, we listen to the Responsorial Psalm (most often sung, but sometimes proclaimed). This, most often, comes from the Book of Psalms in the Bible, and is a song to God. It is a response to the first reading. (This means you should be able to see a theme emerging between the first reading, the Psalm and the Gospel.) Too many times, we forget that this is also a part of the Word of God, and not just a song to sing between the readings . . . we need to listen (and participate) in order to hear God speaking here, too.

The second reading is always taken from the New Testament (the part of the Bible written about Jesus and the emerging Church, after the Resurrection). Usually it is taken from a letter of St. Paul, but could be taken from one of the other letters (James, Peter, John, or Jude). This reading usually week to week goes through the letter, and so is not picked for its theme. We listen to the Apostles, the first teachers of the Church, as they instruct us how to live as Church – the Body of Christ.

Next week, we'll continue working our way through the Liturgy of the Word. In the meantime, let's ask the Holy Spirit to speak to us through the Bible that we may hear God's Word speaking to our hearts.