

## Homily – 6<sup>th</sup> SUN – ORD A – on Liturgy of the Word

Two weekends ago, Fr. John kicked off our four-part tour of the Mass with his talk on the *Introductory Rites*... This am/pm, I will be your guide as we continue our tour of the Mass by taking a close look at the first principal part of the Mass: the Liturgy of the Word,... - which begins with the readings from Scripture– the Bible – followed by the homily, the creed – our profession of faith – and concludes with the Prayers of the Faithful – our prayers for the whole world... We will look at the structure of the Liturgy of the Word,... how we respond to it,... and how it prayerfully leads us into the celebration of the Liturgy of the Eucharist - the second principal part of the Mass - that Fr. John will guide us through next weekend.

OK. Here we go... Let's start our tour with this basic truth: **God wants to speak to His people ... to us**... God wants to speak to us about His love for us,... a love that began before we were born,... before He created the world... God wants to speak to us about the goodness of all creation... God wants to tell us what kind of God He is... not only strong, righteous and just,... but also gentle, merciful and loving... God wants to tell us about His dream to establish His Kingdom of justice, peace, and love here on earth... He wants to tell us of the life beyond the one we now know,... the wonderful new life in heaven.... And so the Church has given us the Liturgy of the Word during Mass as the special time to hear God speak to us through the inspired words of Sacred Scripture and through the homily which connects the Scripture to our everyday lives. ... Now the words we hear are not old words, dead words... something God said a long time ago. .... The living God is speaking "live" to us right here and right now... As our Church teaches, **"It is Jesus Himself who speaks when the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church."**

And how do we respond – what do we do – as God, as Jesus, speak to us in the Liturgy of the Word?... There are several ways we respond, as we'll see when we look at the various parts of the Liturgy of the Word.... But, our primary response, our primary task is to listen,... not just with open ears but with open hearts and minds... because for sure God will speak a tailor-made word to each of us at every Mass... It may be a word of comfort... or a nudge... It may be a challenge... or a new way of seeing things... All we need to do is listen... really listen... We don't want to be like the members of that church whose pastor complained that his parishioners were not paying attention during his homilies.... So one Sunday, he decided to try an experiment.... In the middle of his homily he paused and said: "I murdered my grandmother this morning." ... Then without skipping a beat, he continued his homily... When the Mass was over, the pastor stood outside the church and parishioner after parishioner shook his hand but didn't say a word about him killing his grandmother.... They said things like, "Wonderful message, pastor!" ... "That was a great homily, Father!" ... Finally, one man shook the pastor's hand and jokingly said to him, "I'm sure she had it coming."... The pastor wondered, "Is this guy the only one who had heard me?".... My friends, if we are going to catch everything God wants us to hear, we need to give Him our total, undivided attention.

The Liturgy of the Word is a conversation... God speaks to His people and the people respond. **God speaks and we respond**... Here's how it goes:... First using the voice and the spirit of the lector, God speaks to us through the Old Testament... The First reading, except in special seasons, comes from the Old Testament,... the words coming to us from our Jewish ancestors... It may be a story from the history of Israel, or a selection from 1 of the prophets or one of the Wisdom writings... The presence of an Old Testament reading in our Liturgy of the Word reflects the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament – both lead us to Jesus Christ... On most Sundays, the Old Testament reading relates in some way to the Gospel reading, ... again underscoring this connection. .. The ancient story of God and the Jewish people is also our story.... It is part of our religious heritage.

The Liturgy of the Word begins when the lector PROCLAIMS the Old Testament reading. Now, PROCLAIMING is more than just reading the right words...A good lector will have prepared by reading the text and reflecting on it and practicing it so that he/she will be comfortable making frequent eye contact with the people ...A good lector will command the listeners' attention, as if to say, "Hey, this is an important message....Pay attention!"

OK the lector proclaims the first reading, and concludes by saying, "The Word of the Lord,"... and we respond, "Thanks be to God"...as we express our gratitude that God has spoken to us...Then after having listened attentively to God's Word,...we fall silent for a moment and let it settle into our minds and hearts to more fully grasp what God is saying to us personally. For example, in today's first reading, Sirach says if we follow God's laws and trust in God, we will have eternal life...During this time of silence, we might think about how we've been doing at following God and trusting God, and ask Him to help us to do better.

Silence is an important part of the Liturgy of the Word and every other part of the Mass. ...Personally, I don't think we allow enough silent time for reflection and prayer...We need to do better at this, without - of course - going too far...You may have heard about the young monk who joined a monastery where he was sworn to total silence to pray and reflect...He couldn't talk at all,...except every five years, he could speak two words....Five years pass and the head monk comes to tell him it was time for him to speak his two words. ....The young monk says, "Bed hard!"...Five more years pass and the head monk again comes to tell him to speak his two words....This time he says, "Food bad!" Another five years go by ...When the head monk comes to hear his two words...the not-so-young anymore monk says, "I quit!"...The head monk shakes his head,.. "I knew this was coming....You've done nothing but complain since you got here!"...Well, we won't give you 5 years for silent reflection, but we will try to give you more than 5 seconds, because taking in and responding to the Word of God can only be done well if enough time is allowed for silence.

This time of silence after the first reading is followed by a more lively response as we sing the Responsorial Psalm....The Psalms, of course, cum from the Old Testament Book of Psalms – the ancient song-book of the Church....The Psalm is our sung response to what God has said to us through the first reading... The cantor or choir sings the psalm verses and we sing the response....as we did a moment ago: "Blessed are they who follow the Law of the Lord," was our response to Sirach's message about following and trusting God.

Our conversation with God continues with the Second reading as God speaks to us through the New Testament...The Second reading opens up to us the beliefs, practices and struggles of the early Church through the writings of St. Paul, St. Luke and other apostles...Their windows into the first Christian communities provide wonderful examples for all followers of Jesus who are called to live decently,... without sin or selfishness,... to be tolerant of one another,... and steadfast in faith...After hearing the voice of God as the lector proclaims the words of those first Christian writers,...we again express our gratitude: "Thanks be to God", and spend some time silently reflecting on what we just heard.

The Liturgy of the Word now moves to the proclamation of the Gospel... and we see a lot more happening here than for the first to readings...because it is through the Gospel that Christ Himself speaks, calling us to a deeper faith and conversion....Music begins, everyone stands and the cantor or choir leads us in singing the Gospel acclamation which is usually the "Alleluia" which means "praise God"...*A different acclamation of praise is sung during Lent*...Our "alleluia" should be alive and filled with joy because we are praising not some dead hero like Abe Lincoln or Martin Luther King,...but Jesus Christ – alive and present among His people – here

to proclaim the Good News of salvation!...So, how did we do with our “alleluia” today?...Was it alive and filled with joy? ...Hmm? Think we could do better? I mean, come on,...(*holding up Book of Gospels*) This is Jesus Christ speaking to us!...Let’s give Him the welcome He deserves.

As we sing the alleluia, the deacon receives a blessing from the priest, then lifts high the Book of Gospels as a sign that Jesus, the Living Word of God,...has come into our midst... After the deacon announces the Gospel,... we all trace the cross on our forehead, our lips, and our heart, to express our readiness to open our mind to the Good News,... share it with our voice...and hold it in our heart....Using the voice and spirit of the deacon, Christ Jesus reveals Himself to us in the stories and teachings recorded by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John...We all stand out of reverence,... and to better hear His words,... just as the crowds in His time must’ve done,... eager and straining to hear every word from His lips. ...words that have the power to change lives...After the Gospel is proclaimed, having heard Jesus speak, we give Him praise:... “Praise to You Lord, Jesus Christ” and we pause in silence to let His words sink in.

After the Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel readings have been proclaimed, we have the homily...The main purpose of the homily is to take a theme from one or more of these writings from long, long ago and apply it to what is happening today - in our lives today...When the homilist – the preacher – does a good job of preparation...consulting the work of biblical scholars,... praying with and meditating on the readings,...letting the Holy Spirit inspire and guide his thoughts and words,...we can be confident that Jesus is speaking to us through the homilist...Again, as with the readings from Scripture,... we need to really listen if we are to grasp what Jesus wants us to get out of the homily...It won’t be the same for every-1...bc we each cum here with different needs,...carrying different burdens,...w different questions...at different places in our faith...And even wen the preaching isn’t very eloquent or inspiring,...even if we’re having trouble staying with it,...there will be a msg from Jesus in there for each of us...It might be just a little reminder... or it might be life-changing...but it.will be there...At the end of the homily, we again have a period of silence to give us time to gather our thoughts about what we have heard.

Up to this point, our conversation with God has been pretty one-sided, with God doing most of the speaking...After the homily, this changes...We have listened to and reflected on the readings and the homily, ...We’ve been reminded of how God’s power and love are working in our lives,... and now it is our time to speak...We do this first through the words of the creed: “We believe in One God, the Father almighty.” ...We stand and recite as a community of believers – as the Body of Christ - the words that express our deeply held beliefs,... and we renew our commitment to a life shaped and guided by those beliefs.

After professing our common faith,...in faith we go to the Lord with our prayers and petitions, what we call the Prayers of the Faithful...Together we pray for church and public leaders, ...for all who are suffering or hurting in any way,...for those who have died,...for other needs around the world ... and for the unspoken needs we hold in our hearts....When the Presider says the prayer that concludes the Prayers of the Faithful, the Liturgy of the Word comes to an end... We have been fed and nourished by the Word of G – Jesus Christ Himself- and are ready to move into the Liturgy of the Eucharist to be fed and nourished by His Body and Blood... and to become one with Him and with one another as we celebrate Holy Communion.

Let me end by saying that what I have described is what can happen when the Liturgy of the Word is done well. ...For it to happen, each of us must do our part...This means we must commit to really participate...really put ourselves into it...into the listening, the praying, the

silence, the singing...all of it...Make our liturgies really come alive!...This means that if we expect our lector and homilist to be prepared,...then we too, as hearers of the Word, ought to be prepared....We can do this by reading the Sunday readings before we come to Mass... *The readings for each Sunday can be found in the previous Sunday's bulletin*...Spend a few minutes reading them, get a sense of how they unfold,... prayerfully reflect on their meaning...so when we hear the readings and homily at Mass, we can get more fully into them...and get much more out of them...

My friends, the Word of G that comes to us in the Liturgy of the Word has the power to transform us...give us new life...shape our character...make us stronger...grow us into the image of Jesus Christ.... When we come to Mass, we can let that power go untapped, ...or we can let it change us. It's our choice! AMEN!