

DIOCESAN LITURGICAL COMMISSION CHRISTCHURCH

NEWSLETTER No. 20 – MAY 2000

To Priests and Pastoral Assistants
Parish Liturgy Committees
Parish Councils
Directors of Religious Studies
Religious Houses
Principals, Catholic Schools
All Parishioners



The LITURGY OF THE WORD

In this newsletter we want to step back and reflect on the significance of what is happening when the **Liturgy of the Word** is celebrated at Mass. The goal is *to raise the standard of how this is done*, particularly in respect of the Scripture readings and profession of faith.

The Mass is one Act of Worship

The Liturgy of the Word is integrally connected with the Liturgy of the Eucharist to form *one divinely instituted act of worship*.

Preparing to hear the Word of God

The special and sacred character of what we do when we gather for Mass is impressed on us by the **Introductory Rites**, designed to focus our minds on who we are, as a worshipping congregation. These Introductory Rites culminate in the **Opening Prayer**, which prepares all present to hear the Word of God.

HEARING the WORD of GOD

We cannot emphasise or reflect too often that this *is* what is about to happen. When the Scriptures are read in the Church **God Himself is speaking to his people**; is addressing each one of us, here and now. We enter into the **unending dialogue between God and the covenant people**. The Word of God is active. At Mass, it can always speak to us afresh, elicit a new response from us, make us aware of our need for conversion.

How does this dialogue unfold?

READING from the OLD TESTAMENT

First, we have a reading from the **Old Testament**, which is the story of God's self-disclosure to his people Israel, preparing them and the world for the coming of his Son. It is the beginning of the story of **our** salvation. Listening to the words and deeds of God in the Old Testament reading helps us to recognise his action in our own lives. This is absolutely essential for us, since God's ways are not our ways.

RESPONSORIAL PSALM

The dialogue continues with the **responsorial psalm**. Having heard and taken to heart God's Word to us, **we respond** with words that are themselves God-given. The psalms are **revealed prayers**, prayers that have expressed the faith and the feelings of God's people over so many centuries.

These are prayers that Jesus Himself used.

All human emotions are to be found in the psalms – wonder and praise, repentance and sorrow, hope and trust, joy and exultation, even anger and despair.

They teach us how to pray.

The psalm is carefully chosen as the response to the Word already proclaimed. It is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word **and therefore cannot be replaced with a hymn or song** unless the hymn or song is itself a psalm or based on a psalm.



The responsorial psalm of the day is **preferably sung**, but if this is not possible it should be **prayerfully recited** in a manner conducive to meditation. We are meant to hear and discern God's Word in the psalms, to adopt them as our own prayer, to experience them as the prayer of the Church. (See Newsletter No.14, November 1995)

READING from the NEW TESTAMENT

The second reading is from the
Acts of the Apostles or the Epistles (Letters).

The Acts of the Apostles is the story of the Spirit working in the infant Church, as the Apostles go about continuing Christ's work of teaching, healing, and forgiving sin. **They remain our inspiration and working model**, since this is what we too have to do.

The Epistles or Letters **are the inspired reflection on what Christ taught.** They are **vital** and **urgent** communications addressed to us just as much as to the first hearers. **Preferably, this second reading should be proclaimed by a different reader.**



THE GOSPEL READING – Encounter with CHRIST

The Liturgy of the Word culminates in the **Gospel** reading,
its high point,
and this must be **clearly distinguished by marks of honour.**
It is preceded by the Gospel Acclamation, the “Alleluia” verse, for
which we all stand.

Here, we encounter Christ in a quite direct and immediate way. We hear the story of the life and works and words, the saving death and resurrection of the Son of God made man, Jesus Christ, who is our **Way**, our **Truth**, and our **Life**. Jesus, who is himself the **WORD** of God.

So the Gospel is **read by the priest, or deacon,**
servers with candles stand alongside,
the book **may be incensed** before the text is proclaimed.
We remain **standing** to listen to it.

In all these readings God speaks to his people and nourishes us, nourishes our life in union with his Holy Spirit, **that new life to which we have been called by Baptism**, our call to holiness.

This new life of the Spirit must be fed, much as ordinary food is necessary to our bodily survival and growth. We cannot live the life to which we are called by Baptism **unless** we are nourished with the food God gives us for it -
his Word in the Scriptures,
his Body and Blood in the Eucharist.

THE HOMILY

The dialogue continues with the **homily**. This should help us to see how God continues to be present in our own lives, and **what he asks of us**.

The PROFESSION of FAITH

Then,
in the **profession of faith**
priest and people give solemn assent to the Word of God heard in the readings and homily.
This is a solemn affirmation of our faith, **declared by each one of us**, before God, in the midst of the worshipping community.

It needs to be said slowly enough for us to be very conscious of what we are saying, not rapidly and mechanically.

The **general intercessions (prayer of the faithful)** follow and conclude the Liturgy of the Word.
(See Newsletter No. 13, July 1999)

Please send comments or questions to:

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- THE LITURGY OF THE WORD -

CERTAIN THINGS SHOULD FOLLOW OUR BELIEF

If we believe that in the Liturgy of the Word we are engaged in a dialogue with God in which he addresses each one of us, certain things should follow.

Movement, Action and Posture

All the movements, actions and posture of those ministering in the Liturgy need to manifest their attentive reverence for what they are doing, their awareness that they are engaged with the sacred, their recollecteness.

This is **BASIC**, and it can be secured
without undue difficulty.
People ministering **CAN BE TAUGHT** how
to conduct themselves appropriately.



READERS of the WORD

What is much more difficult to achieve is the high level of performance required of the ministers of the Word, the readers.

Consider what is involved.

∫ *God is speaking to the assembly through them.*

The impact of the message depends significantly on **their conviction, their preparation, and their delivery**. It is an awesome responsibility.

Poor readers quite simply wreak havoc with the Word of God and make it difficult, or even impossible, to hear Him.

∫ *Readings need first to be loud enough and clear enough to be heard.*

But **audibility** requires more than this.

∫ *It means reading intelligently, with sensible phrasing so that the meaning is communicated.*

∫ *Knowing how to pause for the listeners to absorb and digest.*

∫ *Being able to modulate the voice so that the style of the passage and its intentions are effectively conveyed.*

For example, proclaiming the Old Testament reading will be very different from the prayerful recitation of the psalm. The tone of the second reading will be different again.

**We need to be clear that
not every worthy parishioner
who would like to read at Mass can do this!
Only those who have the appropriate skill
should be invited to proclaim the Word of God.**

Readers need to have **suitable voices**, experience in their **effective use**, and willingness to go on working at this ministry. It is a **serious and onerous commitment** on the part of people who already have the prerequisite gifts.

**It is IRRESPONSIBLE for
anyone arranging the celebration
to fail to ensure that the Word of God
will be properly proclaimed.
The effort required is warranted by its importance
in the celebration of the Mass.**