

Why Liturgy Matters? Part One!

Did you know that the vision embraced by the Second Vatican Council was intended to regain the spirit of the early Church's liturgical celebrations? What so many people see as new, is in fact, a **rediscovery** of the early Christian communities that were imbued with the spirit of the Gospels! In the early Church, the core format of liturgical celebrations was one in which, all people present **actively** participated in the worship of God. The aim of liturgical renewal was to help us recover the vitality of faith in God as well as love and service of our neighbors. That is why the Council Fathers declared that active and conscious participation by all present should be the norm for the liturgy, even if that meant changing the centuries-old prohibition against using vernacular languages in the Roman rite. The Council Fathers reminded us that Christ is present when the word is proclaimed, Christ is present in the People of God, and Christ is present in the Priest and in a special way in the bread and wine. How important was this? Well, the first document issued from the Second Vatican Council was on liturgy. For more information, I encourage you to read the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*. In this article, I will focus on the Liturgy of the Word.

Sunday Scripture Readings. *These are extended over a three-year cycle (designated by letters A, B, C) and form a unified whole. Each Sunday and major feast has three readings. This year we are observing the Year C cycle (Johnson 36).-The **First reading** is taken from the Old Testament except during Easter when, following ancient tradition, the selection is from the Acts of the Apostles (Johnson 36).*

*- The **Responsorial Psalm** is an integral part of the liturgy. The psalm as a rule is drawn from the Lectionary (the official liturgical book from which readings are proclaimed.) because the individual psalm texts are directly connected with the individual readings: the choice of the psalm depends therefore on the readings (GIRM 36) -The **Second reading** is taken from the epistles or the Book of Revelation (Johnson 36).-The essential feature differentiating each year is the **Gospel**. During **Year A** there is a semi-continuous reading from **Matthew**; **Year B** from **Mark**; **Year C** from **Luke**. Because of the brevity of Mark's Gospel, Year B is augmented by readings from John (Johnson 36). Either the presiding celebrant (priest) or a deacon proclaims the gospel at the celebration of the sacrament of the Eucharist.*

Weekday Readings. *The Ordinary days have only two readings. The first reading is from the Old Testament, the epistles, or Book of Revelation. The first readings after Epiphany and Pentecost are spread over a cycle of two years. The idea was to present extensive readings from the New Testament and limited readings from the First Testament so that the particular flavor of the various books would be appreciated by the faithful. The Gospel readings are taken from the Mark for the first nine weeks, from Matthew for weeks ten to twenty-one and from Luke for weeks twenty-two to thirty-four (Johnson 36).*

Participation of the Assembly. *As people gathered together as one in a liturgical assembly, the people are hope to participate by "listen(ing) to the word of God with an inward and outward reverence that will bring continuous growth in the spiritual life and draw them more deeply into the mystery they celebrate" (GIRM 45). The assembly is also encouraged to respond the appropriate acclamation after the scripture readings as well as respond to the psalm prayer.*

THE PROCLAMATION OF THE WORD IS A SPOKEN EVENT, NOT A COMMUNAL READING EXERCISE (Johnson 39). The gathered assembly is therefore expected to follow the readings by LISTENING and NOT BY READING THE MISSALETTE or SUNDAY MISSAL unless the person has some difficulty with one's hearing.

*At the proclamation of the first and second readings, as well as the singing or proclamation of the psalms the people remain **seated**. Everyone rises up on their feet while singing the Gospel acclamation. The people **trace** the sign of the cross on their foreheads, their mouths and their hearts immediately following the introduction of the Gospel (e.g. a reading from the holy gospel according to...). The standing posture during the proclamation of the gospel is a gesture that expresses "their joy, reverence and alertness. In this sense, their standing becomes a confession without words" (Adam 43). **Gospel Acclamation**. It is an acclamation, a joyful shout of readiness and anticipation (Johnson 51). The alleluia is sung in every season outside Lent (GIRM 37). **The Homily**. In a nutshell, the homily is an interpretation of the Scripture readings and its relevance to our day-to-day life. The assembly is seated while the presiding celebrant (priest) or a deacon delivers his homily.*

***The Profession of Faith (The Creed)**. The symbol or profession of faith in the celebration of Mass serves as a way for the people to respond and to give their assent to the word of God heard in the readings and through the homily and for them to call to mind the truths of faith before they begin to celebrate the Eucharist (GIRM 43). Everyone stands to proclaim the creed up until the concluding prayer by the priest after the General intercessions. **General Intercessions**. It is a communal prayer, which entreats God on behalf of the people (the church) and their needs. Also known as **Prayers of the Faithful** since in the early church the catechumens, not allowed to participate in the early church, were formally dismissed before this prayer (Johnson 65).*

*References: Adam, Adolf. *The Eucharistic Celebration: The Source and Summit of Faith*. Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1994.*

General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM).

*Johnson, Lawrence. *The Word and the Eucharist Handbook*. San Jose, California: Resource Publications, Inc., 1998. Keifer, Ralph A. *To Give Thanks and Praise: General Instruction of the Roman Missal with Commentary for Musicians and Priests*. Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1980. Keifer, Ralph A. *To Give Thanks and Praise: General Instruction of the Roman Missal with Commentary for Musicians and Priests*. Washington, D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1980*