

## **REDISCOVERING THE MASS: A TASTE OF HEAVEN ON EARTH PART 2:**

### **Continuing our Walk through the Mass: The Liturgy of the Word: First Reading through Prayers of the Faithful**

The Catholic Church teaches that God is the Author of Sacred Scripture. The books of the Bible have been written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The human authors of the sacred books were inspired by God. The books of Sacred Scripture firmly, faithfully, and without error teach that truth which God, for the sake of our salvation, wished to see confided to the Sacred Scriptures. The task of giving an authentic interpretation of the Word of God, whether in its written form or in the form of Tradition, has been entrusted to the living, teaching office of the Church alone.

Sacred Scripture is God's Word that comes to us in human communication. Scripture is both Divine and human at the same time in a way which does not diminish either one. There are two authors of each book of the Bible. The Divine author is God from Whom the Word comes. Through the Holy Spirit, God communicated to the human writer to write what they wrote. However, they were authors in their own right, making a contribution of their own to the final product. They did not write as automatons or robots. There are many human authors because God's Word in Scripture comes to us in human communication over a long period of time.

The Bible is God's Word to us, His message to us, His communication of Himself to us. It is His communication of His plan to us. God is Scripture's source. At the same time, however, the Divine language from God comes to us in a human communication, a human reality, in a way in which we can relate.

God did not "dictate" His word to the human author. Scripture is a collaborative product of two parties. God is the source of the message and the

human writers are authors who gave completely of themselves and all of their gifts and talents to the production of the particular writing.

Since the Scriptures have a divine origin and source, they hold authority for us. To interpret and discern God's word we participate in this gift of God to us. But also, because it is a human communication we must keep in mind that Scripture is historically limited, written in an historically-conditioned language. Scripture must be interpreted within the historical context in which it was written. The Catholic Church is charged by God with the authority to interpret the Word of God.

The Bible is a library of 73 books by 40 authors. It contains various literary forms: prophetic oracles, parables, narratives, discourse, poetry, history. Most books of the Bible were written down based on oral tradition, usually long after events took place. The word testament means covenant. The Old Testament contains the covenant with God's chosen people, the Israelites. The New Testament contains the New Covenant established with the Blood of Christ.

The Bible contains revelation: God communicating His person, life, and purpose for us through Jesus Christ. God reveals Himself through word and deed in scripture and calls us to enter into life with Him. The Bible teaches us Who God is by showing us His deeds which take place in time and space.

- Was there ever anything in the Bible you didn't understand when you were younger, but now understand?
- What is a question you still wrestle with?

**We begin our walk through the Liturgy of the Word with a quote from St. John of the Cross:**

“The Father spoke one Word, which was His Son, and this Word He speaks always in eternal silence, and in silence must it be heard by the soul.”

Jesus Himself is The Word of God...He is the self-revelation of God. The Father continues to speak to us and reveals Himself in creation and in the unfolding of human history. The center and fulfillment of all God's saving events culminate in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Fundamentally, the Liturgy is an action of God. This action can be characterized as a conversation between the Father and the Son. The Son, who shares in our human nature, speaks to the Father on our behalf and the Father, who is Love, speaks eternally this Love to and through the Son. This divine conversation takes place throughout the Mass, but is most evident in the Liturgy of the Word. When meditating upon what is happening in Mass, a useful question to ask yourself is "who is speaking right now—Jesus or the Father?"

The readings at Mass follow a three-year cycle. Year A uses readings from St. Matthew's Gospel; Year B from St. Mark's Gospel; and Year C from St. Luke's Gospel. Readings from St. John's Gospel are spread throughout each year. What cycle are we in now? (A)

### **1. The First Reading:**

In the First Reading we hear the Father speaking His divine plan throughout the ages. This is usually from the Old Testament although it is from the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter Season.

The first reading is chosen because it has a connection to the Gospel. This shows us the consistency of God's Plan of Salvation throughout the ages. God is not going to change His mind tomorrow and unveil a new savior or a new bible. Throughout all time He has been preparing us for Jesus and with Christ's arrival, we have encountered the fullness of Divine Revelation.

Events in the Old Testament often prefigure Jesus. Prefigurement means that what occurred in the Old Testament was a preparation for the New Testament. Thus, the Old Testament meaning is fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of

Jesus. We cannot understand the New Testament unless we know the Old Testament stories and background that prepared for Jesus' ministry.

The Old Testament reading also gives us a context from which we can understand what Jesus is saying to us. Sometimes, Jesus said things that were difficult to interpret...at times even the Apostles didn't understand what Jesus was saying. Looking back into the Old Testament is a tool to help guide us into a knowledge of Christ's words and deeds.

Jesus, the Messiah, is the fulfillment of prophecies made to the Jewish people and written in the Old Testament. Our roots are firmly planted in the Old Testament and the Jewish faith. Jesus was a faithful, practicing Jew. Our understanding of Jesus is richer when steeped in the knowledge of the books of the Old Testament.

At the end of the first and second readings, the congregation acclaims: "Thanks be to God," "Deo gratias." We offer thanks to God Who willed the words we just heard to be said or written.

## **2. Responsorial Psalm:**

The responsorial Psalm is a prayer offered back to the Father.

The Psalms are a collection of inspired prayers. They are prayers that God has given us so we know how to pray. Jesus Himself used them often. The Psalms cover every conceivable human emotion from despair, to joy, to sorrow, to gratitude, and beyond. So in the responsorial Psalm, the Church prays the words that God has given to us.

The responsorial Psalm is always taken from one of the 150 Psalms in the Old Testament. Several lines of the psalm are said or sung. Then the people respond by singing or saying a verse from the psalm as a refrain. The psalm helps us reflect on the Old Testament scripture passage that we have just heard proclaimed. It usually echoes the reading just heard.

### **3. The Second Reading:**

The Father responds to our prayer offered by the Psalm through the words of the New Testament which explains what He is doing.

The second reading is always taken from the New Testament. It is read in a “semi-continuous” manner. Over the course of a few Sundays, the Church will read through a single book of the New Testament, more or less. When we get to the end of that book, we switch to another book of the New Testament.

The second reading is taken from one of the New Testament epistles or letters, usually one of St. Paul’s. Paul, Peter, and John sent letters of encouragement and/or correction to communities of believers. Often they were clarifying a teaching that was being erroneously interpreted. The underlying assumption in each letter is the oral tradition of the Gospel taught the believers when they were baptized.

The second reading usually will not have the same theme as the other readings at that particular Mass. Instead, it will focus on some important theological point. So the second reading is more of a theological lesson on what living a life of faith entails.

### **4. Alleluia:**

“Alleluia” is a Hebrew word that literally translates: “all of you, praise God.” It comes from Psalm 150. It is an Israelite expression of joy which recalls the Lord’s coming.

Alleluia is a command. By singing the Alleluia at this point in the Mass, the Church exults with the whole chorus of God’s people throughout the ages in ecstatic praise. It praises God for all that He has done throughout the history of the world. It praises God for what He is doing now in the Mass. It praises God for all that He will do in our lives. It praises God for revealing Himself to us through Jesus Christ. But most importantly, it praises God for Jesus Himself as we turn to

the Gospel to hear again the words and deeds of Christ. After all, the Gospel is Good News!

**Questions for consideration:**

- What is your favorite Old Testament story?
- Is there a particular person in the Old Testament with whom you relate?
- Where do you see Jesus prefigured in the Old Testament?
- What is your favorite Psalm?
- In what ways do you see yourself resembling St. Paul?
- Is there an event in the life of one of the Apostles that really speaks to you?
- What aspect of a life of faith do you find most difficult to live?
- What is the moment in your life for which you praise God the most?
- How do you praise God in action?

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Jesus Christ is the one High Priest from whom the ordained priesthood and the priesthood of all believers come. There is one priesthood of Christ and two ways the faithful share in it: the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial priesthood. Pope St. John Paul stated: “The priesthood is a gift from on high...the sovereign will of God Who freely chooses His pastors.” The priesthood presupposes a vocation from God and the Church’s discernment and confirmation of this vocation.

The Sacrament of Holy Orders refers to a sacred hierarchy. Through the Sacrament of Holy Orders, bishops, priests and deacons are set aside by ordination

which confers on a man the gift of the Holy Spirit to act “in persona Christi.” Through the laying on of hands and the prayer of consecration the man is “set apart.” Christ acts through the priests and bishops in persona Christi Capitis...in the person of Christ, the Head. An indelible character bestowed in Holy Orders configures the man to the person of Christ. The priest is an icon, a sign of Jesus Christ who became a man.

**The grace of the Holy Spirit is given through ordination...**

***Bishop:*** to govern, guide, defend the Church

***Priest:*** to preach the Gospel, offer Mass, and celebrate Sacraments

***Deacon:*** to serve in the ministry of charity and the Word

***Bishops*** carry on apostolic succession. Jesus empowered the apostles with a special outpouring of the Spirit and they passed their spiritual gifts onto their co-workers, the bishops.

***Priests*** are the bishop’s extension; they collaborate with their bishop. Through the ministerial priesthood, the ordained man is given the power of consecrating and offering the true body and blood of Christ in the Mass and of forgiving sins committed after Baptism through Penance and Anointing of the Sick. Priests are set apart for service of the common priesthood. Through the priest Christ builds up and leads His Church.

The Holy Spirit works through a priest even if he is weak, sinful, dominating, wrong...as long as he intends to do what the Church does, according to the mind of the Church. Sinful priests do not hinder the efficacy of the Sacraments they confer. The Catholic Church teaches that the Sacraments work “ex opere operato” -- by the work performed not by the person performing them. Once ordained always ordained a priest, bishop or deacon. A priest may be dispensed from functioning and priestly vows but he remains a priest.

**Deacons** are configured to the character of Christ the servant. The diaconate may be conferred on married men, but deacons may not marry.

Only baptized men can receive Holy Orders. Jesus and the apostles chose only men to be ordained priests and bishops. The Church is bound by this choice which Jesus Himself made. The Catholic Church is not able to ordain women to the priesthood. In *Ordinatio Sacerdotalis*, 1994, Pope St. John Paul wrote: “I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church’s faithful.” This is part of the Deposit of Faith.

The Catholic Church cannot change the substance of a sacrament. The matter of Holy Orders is a man (vir). The priest acts in persona Christi, in the person of Christ. There must be a natural likeness to Christ in the male body of the priest. Women in the femaleness of their bodies represent the Church, virgin and mother.

There were deaconesses in the early Church. They were either the wife of a deacon or a widow or virgin. They performed acts of charity and ministered to women. Deaconesses assisted in baptizing women. Men and women were baptized separately in the nude. These deaconesses were not ordained.

--Has there been a priest in your life who was important to you?

## **5. The Gospel:**

In the Gospel, the Father speaks most clearly in and through His Son. The Gospel is read by a priest or deacon. In ordination, the Spirit of Jesus is given to a priest or deacon. This allows Jesus Himself to speak to the Church in the Gospels through that gift of ministry of the priest or deacon.

The Gospel reading is from Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John. The Gospel has always held a place of honor and prominence in the life of the Church because it conveys to us the words and deeds of Christ. Jesus Christ Himself speaks to us, to



teach us by the example of His Life and by His own words, what we are to believe and what we are to do.

We stand for and are respectfully attentive to the words of Jesus proclaimed to us who are gathered in His name. We also perform a triple signing with the cross on our forehead, lips, and heart. This signifies our intellectual acceptance of the truth, our readiness to confess it, and our heartfelt attachment to it.

But it extends beyond this. Jesus is the definitive revelation of God and His plan for humanity. This is because Jesus is both fully God and fully human, possessing two natures united in one person. As God, Jesus **IS** the revelation of God; and as man, He reveals humanity to itself.

We encounter Jesus in Scripture and in the Eucharist. Scripture is the Word of God in written form. The Holy Spirit inspired the writers of Scripture to reveal God to us by the written word. That same Holy Spirit works through the words of Scripture to transform us if we open our hearts to Him. **THE** Word of God is Jesus Christ. So we listen to the Gospel with particular attention as we discover again who God is and who we are.

At the end of the Gospel, the Church congregation acclaims the message by acknowledging that it truly is Jesus, the Incarnate God Himself, who has spoken to us by proclaiming: “Praise to you Lord Jesus Christ!”

## **6. The Homily:**

In the homily, the priest interprets and applies the Scriptures just read. He develops, explains and comments upon the words of Jesus to enlighten our minds and enrich our hearts. At its core, the homily is nothing more than a reflection on what has already been proclaimed in order to aid us in incorporating the sacred mysteries into our own lives. In a sense, we have already heard everything that will be said in the readings before the homily ever begins. But at times we need

things explained to us again and we need to be reminded of where we fit into this story.

## **7. The Creed:**

When we proclaim the Creed, we are responding to God's self-revelation and salvation which we have just heard. We are saying to God: We have heard you and we believe you!

The Creed, a statement of belief, originated in the earliest days of the Catholic Church. It is a threefold profession of faith in the Father, in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit, which was made by those being baptized, while being immersed in water three times. This then expanded into a statement of basic beliefs about God and about Who Jesus is.

The Catholic faith is a creedal religion. That means that the Church has declared that there are certain things we must believe to be Catholic. The most important Creed the Church has is the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. It is a combination of the creed drawn up at Nicaea in the year 325 and the creed written in Constantinople in 381. The great heresies they addressed concerned the nature of Christ in relation to the Trinity. This is the Creed which the Church has proclaimed throughout the ages. It is the thing that summarizes the Catholic Faith. Because of this, every Sunday we profess this faith in the context of the Mass, claiming once again that this is our faith and we are proud to profess it out loud. Our faith in God the Father, in Christ Jesus our Lord, and in God the Holy Spirit!

### ***The Creed consists of three parts:***

1. The First Part speaks of the First Divine Person and the work of creation
2. The Second Part speaks of the Second Divine Person and the mystery of His Redemption

3. The Third Part speaks of the Third Divine Person who is the origin and source of our sanctification.

We believe in one God: a Trinity of three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, yet one divine nature. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have the identical infinite Nature. The Son is eternally begotten by the Father and the infinite intensity of their Love is expressed as the Spirit. In the Son, the Father utters His self-knowledge. In the Holy Spirit, The Father and the Son utter their mutual Love.

The Divine Persons do not share one divinity...rather, each is God, whole and entire, yet each is distinct and whole. Their distinction stems from their relationships to each other. God is pure spirit. He has revealed Himself to us in Divine Revelation: "I am Who I am!" (Exodus 3:14)

This is a mystery: God is infinitely above everything we can understand or say. God reveals Himself as the One Who is always here, present to His people. God alone IS: He is the fullness of being and of every perfection, without origin, without end.

God revealed Himself as Father, as the first origin of everything and as transcendent authority. At the same time God is goodness and loving care for all His children. God is Spirit. He is the origin of fatherhood and the perfect standard of fatherhood. Jesus revealed that God is eternally Father in relation to His only Son who is eternally Son only in relation to His Father. Jesus calls us to call God Father and the Church must obey and follow that Command.

God the Father's might is universal. Nothing is impossible with God. He is Lord of the Universe which is subject to Him and at His disposal. God reveals His fatherly omnipotence by the way he takes care of our needs. With His infinite mercy He displays His power by freely forgiving our sins.

God the Father gave a beginning to all that exists outside of Himself. God alone is creator. The totality of what exists depends on the One who gives it being. God created an ordered and good world out of nothing. God is infinitely greater than all His works. He transcends His creation and is present to it. God upholds and sustains creation. God created all that exists -- both earth, the world of men, and the heavens which includes the angels.

We believe in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the second Person of the Trinity, therefore, Jesus is divine. He has always been with the Father. All that the Father is, the Son is. Jesus Christ is one with the Father. From all eternity, Jesus Christ, the Son, has a divine nature. Jesus assumed His human nature by being born of the Virgin Mary. Jesus had to be wholly man, so He could be obedient to the Father and counteract Adam's disobedience and atone for the human race. Jesus had to be God so that His act would have an infinite value to outweigh all the sins man had ever or would ever commit. This is why Jesus Christ's death and resurrection are redemptive. Jesus Christ is our redeemer. (It took the Catholic Church about 300 years to figure this out and understand Who Jesus Christ is.)

We believe in The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son as they combine to express their love. The Holy Spirit is one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, one with the Father and the Son. The Holy Spirit is the breath of God. The Holy Spirit is the Soul of the Church. We come to know the Holy Spirit through the Church which transmits the faith of the apostles through:

- The Bible: The Holy Spirit is the principal author of sacred scripture
- Sacred Tradition: The Church's doctrine of Faith
- Magisterium: The Pope and the Bishops in union with him

- Sacramental Liturgy: through words and symbols
- Prayer: The Holy Spirit prays through us

We believe in one, holy, Catholic, and apostolic Church. The Catholic Church is three inseparable realities: The liturgical assembly, the local community, and the universal Church. The Church is our Mother. The Catholic Church is One: One God instituted one Church to teach the One truth with One founder: Jesus Christ. The Catholic Church is Holy: The most Holy God is her author. The Church is the Body of Christ...her Head, Jesus Christ, is holy. Christ sanctified the Church by giving Himself up for her, His Bride. The Church is Catholic: It is universal. Her mission is universal, to teach the world about Jesus Christ in every place and to every age. The Catholic Church is Apostolic: The Church is built upon the foundation stones of the apostles. The bishops are successors of the Apostles and continue their work and hand on the deposit of faith. They teach what was received from the apostles, who received it from Christ, who received it from the Father.

The Creed is the symbol of faith for Catholics. It shows that a person is truly a Christian. Professing it authenticates a person's Christian faith. Our identity as Christian is tied to the Creed itself. So, every Sunday, we as a Church reaffirm what we believe, joining the ages-long profession of the Catholic faith. We profess Who we believe Jesus is as well as Who the Father and the Spirit is.

In 589, the Council of Toledo, Spain, declared: "Let the Creed resound so that the true faith may be declared in song, and that the souls of believers, in accepting that faith, may be made ready to partake, in communion, of the Body and Blood of Christ."

The Creed we profess contains the canons of our Catholic Faith...brief affirmations and concrete propositions of belief. We are proclaiming doctrines for

which Christians in the Roman Empire suffered imprisonment and even death. There were many and various heresies and false teachings in the early Church, which threatened to tear Christianity apart. Remember, the New Testament was written out of the experience of Tradition in the early decades of Christianity...there was no New Testament yet to protect the Faith. The Creeds put an end to these heresies. The Creed was originally proclaimed during the Sacrament of Baptism. The Nicene Creed was added to the Mass about AD 1000 as an individual proclamation of personal faith and belief to repel heretical doubt.

### **8. The Universal Prayers:**

In the Prayers of the Faithful, we bring our intentions to the Father...the Church, as the Body of Christ, speaks to the Father. The Father reaches the world through the Church and in the Prayers of the Faithful the Church now brings the world to the Father.

Normally, we pray for the Church, for world leaders, for those in difficulties, and for the local community. This is also the time to bring any and all petitions we have to the Lord. We remember our need for God's help, we remember our bond with our family and community, we remember those who are suffering, and we remember those who have died. In a sense, we remember everyone. We bring them to the Lord. Intercessory prayer asks for God's help but more importantly it is an expression of our dependence on God. We turn to God for what we need. In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus tells us to go to the Father with our needs.

This is particularly appropriate at this time because these prayers form a transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist. We bring all of our intentions with the gifts that we are about to present. We offer them to Jesus.

### **Questions for consideration:**

- Do you have a favorite Gospel story?
- Who is Jesus in your life?
- When did you fall in love with Jesus?
- Is there one of the Apostles that you most relate to? Why?
- Do you know the Creed off the top of your head?
- Is there a part of the Creed that speaks most to you personally?
- Is there any aspect of the faith that you struggle with?
- Whom do you find yourself praying for the most?
- Who do you know that needs prayers at this time?

*Notes for*

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**1. The First Reading**

“The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old Testament is unveiled in the New” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* Par. 129)

**2. Responsorial Psalm**

“In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us” (Romans 8:26)

**3. The Second Reading**

“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.” (John 14:26)

**4. Alleluia**

“We are an Easter People and Alleluia is our song!” (Pope St. John Paul II)

**5. The Gospel**

“The angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for behold, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.” (Luke 2:10)

## **6. The Homily**

“Philip ran up and heard the man reading Isaiah the prophet. ‘Do you understand what you are reading?’ Philip asked. ‘How can I,’ he said, ‘unless someone explains it to me?’” (Acts 8:30-31)

## **7. The Creed**

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one that we preached to you, let that one be accursed.” (Galatians 1:8)

## **8. The Universal Prayers**

“I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” (1 Timothy 2:1)