

Dear Friends,

This is my February column on the Mass. Last month I began looking at the Gospel. As I said then, the important thing to remember is that the Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. Therefore, the ritual sets this off from the other Readings with some special marks of respect. We looked at some of these in January:

- ❖ **The Gospel Acclamation** (usually the *Alleluia*)
- ❖ **Standing** as opposed to sitting
- ❖ **The specific naming of an ordained deacon or priest** as the one who is to proclaim the gospel
- ❖ **The blessing** given to the deacon or that the priest asks for himself before reading the Gospel
- ❖ **A special Book of the Gospels** as distinct from the Lectionary which contains the other readings.

There are several additional marks of respect.

The first two Readings are introduced with the simple words: “A reading from the Book [Letter] of...” In contrast, the deacon or priest introduces the Gospel with the greeting “*The Lord be with you.*” All respond, “*And with your spirit.*” As explained in an earlier column, these expressions are not just a general extending of good wishes to one another. Instead, they convey the idea that we are engaged in a sacred action that is intended to touch our inner spirit. The deacon or priest, and then all who are present, express the desire that their inner spirit will be touched, nourished and enlightened by the proclamation of the Gospel that follows.

Then the deacon or priest continues with the introduction of the gospel: “A reading from the holy Gospel according to [Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John].” This statement announces the name of the evangelist from whom the passage for the day is taken. All respond: “*Glory to you, O Lord.*”

As the deacon or priest proclaims “A reading from the holy Gospel...,” he traces the Sign of the Cross with his thumb on the book and then on his forehead, lips, and breast. It is part of our liturgical tradition that all who are present join the priest or deacon in this threefold Sign of the Cross. In doing this, we profess our belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (forehead), our commitment to profess this by what we say (lips), and our intention to take within ourselves the message of the Gospel and to live out this message as the center of our lives (breast).

At the conclusion of the gospel, the deacon or priest speaks the simple acclamation: “The Gospel of the Lord.” This reminds us that we have just heard the Good News of Jesus. All respond “*Praise to you, Lord Jesus*

Christ.” This response conveys the same thing as the response to the introduction of the gospel: “*Glory to you, O Lord.*” Both responses affirm our belief in the presence of Jesus Christ in his proclaimed Word. As the General Instruction of the Roman Missal says, “*When the Sacred Scriptures are read in the Church, God himself speaks to his people, and Christ, present in his own word, proclaims the Gospel.*”

Finally, the deacon or priest kisses the Book of the Gospels as one final act of reverence. He prays quietly: “*Through the words of the Gospel may our sins be wiped away.*” This is one of several times during the Mass when the priest or deacon says prayers in a low voice. These extra, almost inaudible prayers are to center their minds on the meaning of what they have just done, are doing or are about to do.

This series of monthly columns on the Mass began in June 2013. You may read all nine columns to date by going to the parish website at www.stmargaret.org, click on the Information tab and then Bulletins. These columns will be on that page.

May the Lord’s peace be with you and your loved ones!

Father Mike