

Dear Friends,

**This is my January column on the Mass.** Recently I have been reflecting on the Liturgy of the Word – the use of the ambo (pulpit), the overall structure of the entire Liturgy of the Word, the selection of the Readings, and then a specific focus on the first two Readings and the Responsorial Psalm. Today I am looking at the Gospel.

**The first thing to keep in mind is that the Gospel is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word. The ritual sets this off from the other Readings with some special marks of respect.**

- ❖ **The Gospel Acclamation.** The Alleluia (or during Lent another acclamation) is a sung prayer. *Alleluia* is a Hebrew word which means *Praise God* or *Praise the Lord*. This appears often in the psalms of the Old Testament as well as in the Book of Revelation of the New Testament. There it serves as the refrain of a hymn sung in honor of the Lamb, the risen Christ. So, the singing of the Alleluia is both an expression of joy and a greeting to the Lord who is about to speak to us in the Gospel.
- ❖ **Standing.** We stand for the singing of the Gospel Acclamation and the reading of the Gospel. This expresses our respect for Christ who is especially present to us in this reading. The word *Gospel* literally means *Good News* – so the *Good News of Jesus Christ*. Our standing demonstrates that this is the highpoint of the Liturgy of the Word and of all of God's revelation to us.
- ❖ **Deacon or Priest.** The ritual specifies that an ordained deacon or priest is to read the Gospel. This again highlights its distinction and importance.
- ❖ **A Blessing.** The deacon asks the priest for a blessing before reading the Gospel. He says: "*Your blessing, Father.*" The priest responds: "*May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips that you may proclaim his Gospel worthily and well, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" If there is no deacon at the Mass, the priest prays a very similar prayer by himself. This blessing or prayer again sets apart or elevates the reading of the Gospel. By the way, there are several times like this one during the Mass when the priest or deacon says prayers in a low voice. These extra, quiet, almost inaudible prayers are to center their minds on the meaning of what they are doing or about to do.

❖ **The Book of the Gospels.** The first two Readings are proclaimed from the Lectionary. The Gospel for each Sunday is contained in a different book called the Book of the Gospels. This is usually carried in procession at the beginning of Mass and placed on the altar until the deacon or priest elevates it and carries it to the ambo for the reading.

**I will conclude my reflections on the Gospel in a February column.** This series of columns began in June and this is the eighth monthly column on the Mass. You may read the prior columns by going to the parish website at [www.stmargaret.org](http://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